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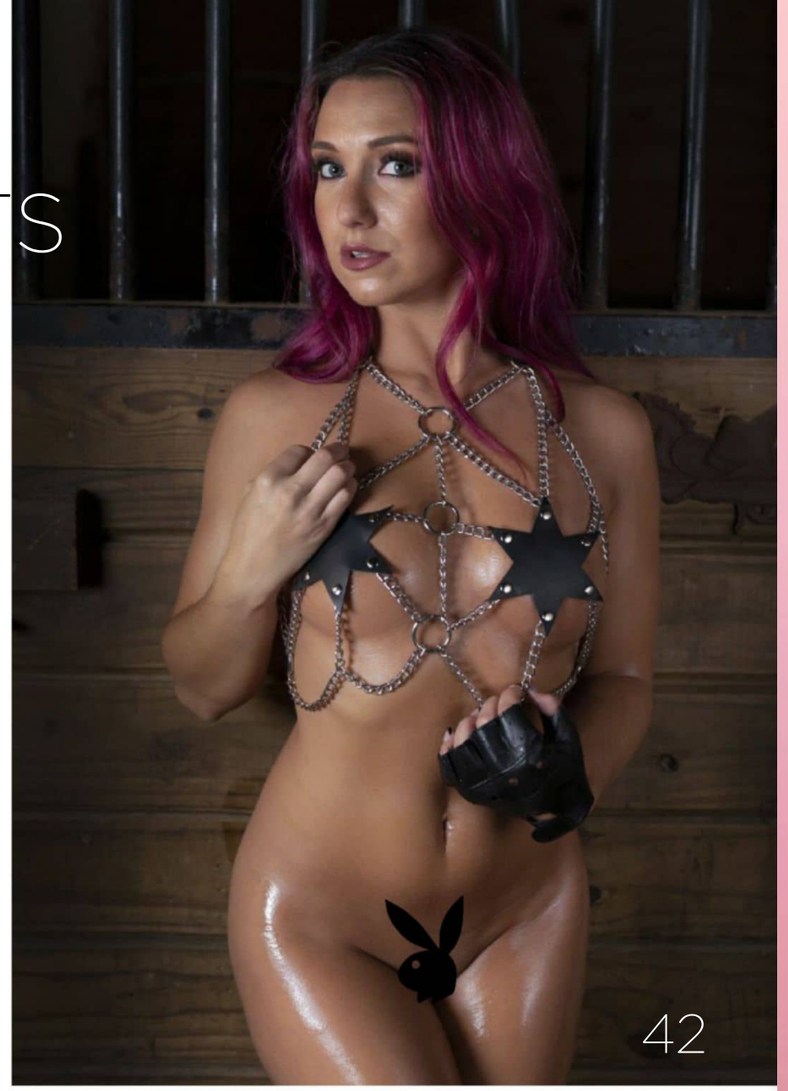

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JUST BRITT
Photography by Ken Mischke
No 27 | **December 2020**

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10 MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

You can’t have a revolution without rest. Here are some therapy resources for Black Americans

BY **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS**

After years of agitation by Black Lives Matter and other activists, national momentum to end police brutality in America is finally growing. We’re edging toward a future in which Black people in the United States can live and thrive without fear. If you are a non-Black person in America, there are plenty of resources out there for you on how to support this movement with your time, your voice or your wallet.

For Black Americans, sometimes the most important mode of resistance can be protecting your own mental health and emotional space. Your mere existence, the simple act of continuing to breathe when so many Black people have been denied that right, is a form of rebellion. To support the emotional well-being of Black Americans at this time, we’ve compiled a list of therapy resources below.

Therapy for Black Girls
The stigma surrounding mental health and therapy often prevents Black women from seeking help, so licensed psychologist Dr. Joy Harden Bradford founded Therapy for Black Girls as a resource to provide accessible mental health support to Black women; the site offers a directory of in-office or virtual therapists. Therapy for Black Girls has also become a successful podcast. @therapyforblackgirls

Loveland Foundation
Loveland Foundation brings healing to communities of color, with a particular focus on Black women and girls. Established in 2018 by Rachel Cargle, it provides financial assistance for Black individuals through the Loveland Therapy Fund. The organization currently partners with Therapy for Black Girls, NQTTCN, Talkspace and Open Path Collective. @thelovelandfoundation

The National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network (NQTTCN)
NQTTCN is a healing justice organization working to transform mental health for queer and trans people of color through increased access to QTPoC healthcare practitioners and increased access to healing justice resources. @nqttcn

Black Mental Health Alliance
The Black Mental Health Alliance works to develop, promote and sponsor educational forums and referral services to support the health and well-being of Black people. The alliance maintains a database for clinicians to connect with patients as well as educate themselves, provide community workshops, and school-based mental health services.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
NAMI was formed in 1979 and has since become a leading voice on mental health, with more than 500 local affiliates. It is a resource for mental health education, advocacy and action. The alliance provides, among other things, advice for Black people interested in therapy and finding a well-matched provider.

Melanin and Mental Health
Licensed therapists Eliza Boquin and Eboni Harris founded Melanin and Mental Health to connect therapy-seeking individuals with clinicians who serve Black and Latinx communities. Their platform includes an online directory and podcast, as well as events focused on mental health and racism @melaninandmentalhealth

Dive in Well
Wellness has become a trillion-dollar market, and Dive in Well was established to ensure that space has diversity. It was founded by Maryam Ajayi, healer and entrepreneur, and offers resources such as corporate training and two- to three-hour workshops focusing on the importance of diversity in the wellness industry, and on fostering true allyship. @diveinwell

Sista Afya
Sista Afya is a Chicago-based organization created for Black women to help them connect and share resources to support their mental health. Low-cost monthly support groups, free events to physically connect, and therapy sessions with a sliding-scale option are on offer. @sistaafya

Inclusive Therapists
Founded by Melody Li to train mental health and wellness professionals as well as to match individuals with therapists, Inclusive Therapists provides culturally affirming, anti-racist, anti-ableist therapy. Its network includes reduced-fee teletherapy. @inclusivetherapists

Ethel’s Club
Ethel’s is a Brooklyn-based social and wellness club that now offers virtual membership due to the pandemic. Its goal is to foster p“community designed for intention, healing and creation,” establishing healing spaces that center and celebrate people of color through conversation, wellness and more.

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OUR ACTION PLAN

As co-founder of the Black Panther Party Huey Newton said in the pages of PLAYBOY magazine in 1973, "America will not be changed until the world is changed. To say that change will come here just through the ballot box would be a fantasy." We're here to do the work. After listening to our Black employees, we devised a deliberate and strategic social-impact plan that focuses on people, policy and culture. Here is our blueprint.

BY **PLAYBOY**

PEOPLE

Playboy Can't Change Others Without Changing Itself

"You develop courage by doing the small things that take courage. Like not sitting in a room where racial pejoratives are used. Like not sitting in a room where gay people are being bashed. I won't do it." —Maya Angelou, 1999

We recognize that marginalized members of our community are the most vulnerable to systemic racism and social injustice. Here is what we are doing to protect, support and amplify our own community.

We commit to hiring more people of color. We are committed to having a truly diverse organization, from our leadership to our contributors. For more than 66 years, we have stood for racial equality and civil liberties—we hold ourselves accountable to making sure that this work starts from within.

We are undertaking initiatives to create space for reflection, education and conversations that bring advocacy to the forefront. As such, we are committing to education through recurring discussions and internal forums to unpack implicit bias and give space for issues to be raised and voices to be heard.

We will host monthly social-impact roundtable meetings to discuss the issues and human rights violations that demand Playboy's focus. We commit to creating a space where employees feel safe to have open dialogues.

To support these monthly meetings, we will create a Slack channel where team members can share resources, articles, initiatives and petitions. We must stay informed and ensure critical conversations stay top-of-mind. The fundamental purpose is to share a consistent stream of data and information that employees feel their peers should be aware of and informed about. It can also be a source that determines the agenda for each monthly meeting.

Playboy Legal Support: We commit to donating pro-bono legal hours to nonprofit organizations in need of such support.

Playboy Mentorship Program: We also commit to the mentorship of formerly incarcerated individuals and those whose opportunities have been unjustly stifled. This support will take the form of pro-bono hours donated by our Career Development team.

The Playboy Purse Is Open

We are putting our money where our mouth is by relaunching the Playboy Foundation with a $250,000 initial fund to support organizations fighting injustice. The Playboy Foundation is immediately donating $150,000 to organizations committed to Black liberation. After internal discussion and research, we have chosen to center our efforts on aiding smaller grassroots organizations that make a direct impact on the freedom, safety and support of Black lives.

POLICIES

"The Constitution did not seek to transform power itself.... Instead, it ensured that more people had access to the ultimately corrupt forms of power that some had been denied." —Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garza, Spring 2020

Playboy understands that change will come not only from the streets but also from the halls of power. We will use our editorial platforms to take a position on policies that are required to dismantle white supremacy and systemic racism. Key issues are summarized below.

Criminal Justice: The U.S. criminal justice system is a glaring and undeniable example of structural racism in this country. We must work to end mass incarceration through changes including pre-trial reform, ending mandatory minimum sentencing, and the removing cannabis from Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act.

Public Safety: We support allocating a greater percentage of municipal funds toward efforts that have been proven to reduce the need for law enforcement, including more significant investments in education and youth programming, mental health services, community development and safe and affordable housing. We call for the diversification of law enforcement teams and mandatory anti-bias training. Deadly and unnecessary force in policing must end now. We must work to solve our problems at the source rather than treat the symptoms.

Voter Suppression: We seek to put an end to voter suppression through increasing access to voter registration, vote by mail and early voting. Efforts to disenfranchise voters disproportionately impact people of color and deprive U.S. citizens of their constitutional right to a voice in our democracy.

Reparations: We support the passage of the H.R.40 Bill, also known as the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. Black Americans have been robbed of generations of wealth and opportunity—from slavery to the Black Wall Street massacre of 1921 to today's career-advancement discrimination and mass incarceration. By not providing reparations for these heinous human rights violations, the United States is perpetuating that original harm.

Health Care: Disparities in access to and quality of health care, along with persistent structural racism in the medical field, put Black lives at risk. These inequalities in health care have an even greater impact on Black women, who are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications as white women. We advocate for investing in programs to connect Black communities with quality, accessible health care, and in programs to expand representation and break down bias in the medical profession.

CULTURE

"The important thing is making sure this shit don't become a trend.... We gotta fix ourselves in the culture." — Lizzo, Spring 2019

At Playboy, we believe that Black culture is American culture. We will continue to use our channels to amplify diverse voices and social justice leaders and to call out practices that perpetuate white supremacy. Our mission is to change public perception and create a culture where all people feel free and safe to pursue their personal pleasure.

Amplification: We will spotlight the diverse voices we work with in a creative, editorial and activist capacity across all our channels, and proactively bring new voices into this community. To support Black Lives Matter today, we launched a dedicated website section, our Black Lives Matter hub, to provide:

- Regularly updated resources and information to share
- Profile key leaders in the movement
- Galleries and features on the work of Black artists, photographers and activists
- Resurfaced articles from our archives, available to the public for free, highlighting key Black thought leaders and voices we have profiled throughout our 66-year history

Internal Culture: We will lead by example. Each member of our executive team has made a personal commitment to donate their time to champion civil rights. We are committed to sourcing suppliers and partnerships with companies that share our values and have significant Black representation on their teams. This includes our auditing and financial partners, our legal resources, our creative agencies and the influencers we work with. And we will be collaborating with a civil rights legal organization to educate our employees on critical legal issues and to lend our support to their efforts.

Socially Responsible Investing: This week, we began working with our 401(k) plan provider to secure our team's access to multiple investment funds that consist solely of companies adhering to ESG (environmental, social and governance) best practices.

CONCLUSION

The Playboy platform reaches millions of people and has been a cultural touchstone for decades. Since our inception, we have been committed to provoking challenging conversations, educating ourselves and our audiences, and shedding light on new perspectives and experiences. It is our responsibility to stand up and speak up where we see injustice, to agitate for change where we can have an impact, and above all else, to seed that change from within. Today, we renew our commitment to using our voice, our brand, and our platform as a vehicle for change in our society. For Black Americans, know that you aren't alone in this fight. For Non-Black Americans, put your guilt and your privilege to meaningful use. Complacency, and thereby complicity, cannot be an option. Let's demand and create change together.

10 TIPS FOR PROTESTING SAFELY IN A PANDEMIC

Exercise your rights while protecting yourself and others

BY **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS**

To those who have the courage and ability to leave quarantine and make your voices heard at the anti-police-brutality protests sweeping the nation, we at Playboy applaud you. Even though the president's actions and the brute-force responses of some elected officials may suggest otherwise, Americans have a constitutional right to assemble.

It's a tradition that informs every democracy, but this spring, it appears to be effecting change. Caving to public pressure, all four of the Minneapolis cops involved in the murder of George Floyd have now been arrested and charged.

As many Americans gear up for another week of protesting, we want you to remember to prioritize your safety and health. Below are some quick tips on what you should know before you go, what to take with you and how to reduce coronavirus risk for yourself and others. Protesting in a pandemic is serious business, but as many have been saying in defense of the protesters, white supremacy and police violence constitute a public health crisis of their own, demanding action.

Research the protest before attending to make sure the organizers are legitimate.

Bring a buddy from your household, or someone you have been quarantining with, and let someone else know where you are going.

COVID-19 is still spreading. Wear a mask, maintain social distancing as much as possible and consider isolating before and again after. If you or someone at home feels sick, stay home!

Wear comfortable, nondescript clothing that can cover identifiable markers such as tattoos.

Consider wearing goggles to protect against rubber bullets or tear gas. Ballistic-grade protective eyewear is available at a range of prices.

Wear your eyeglasses instead of contact lenses; it might provide some small amount of protection for your eyes if you are tear-gassed or pepper-sprayed at close range.

Be sure to have the following on hand: cash, a mask, hand sanitizer, water, snacks, a basic first-aid kit and a washcloth or handkerchief soaked in vinegar in case chemical irritants are used.

Keep your phone on airplane mode to reserve battery, and deactivate face identification on your phone—use a passcode instead.

Write important phone numbers on your arm in permanent marker in case of any emergency, arrest, or if you're separated from your buddy. Consider also writing down the number of the local chapter of your National Lawyers Guild, which has been instrumental in posting bail for protesters who are detained.

Do not instigate violence or destruction or engage with initiators.

Playboy Joins L.A. Pride to Celebrate Equality & Sexual Freedom

Playboy Bunnies and staffers join the LGBT Pride Parade in West Hollywood

BY **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS**

The Playboy staff, along with a cast of Playboy Bunnies (each dressed in a color of the rainbow flag), joined southern California's queer and LGBT ally community for West Hollywood's annual L.A. Pride Parade. Playboy has long championed sexual freedom and equality.

Playboy's Pride presence coincides with Playboy.com's month-long Pride series, which includes personal essays, profiles and interviews featuring Brooklyn Nine-Nine actress Stephanie Beatriz, director John Cameron Mitchell, Younger actor Nico Tortorella, Unreal actor Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman, musician Betty Who, RuPaul's Drag Race: All Stars winner Trixie Mattel, trans activist Ashlee Marie Preston, YouTuber Orion Carloto, Florida Equality Executive Director Nadine Smith, poet Danez Smith, songwriter Justin Tranter, author Jamie Bernstein and sexual neuroscientist Debra W. Soh.

Playboy remains more committed than ever to championing necessary conversations about queerness and sexual identity. Playboy's storytellers are proud to introduce underrepresented LGBT narratives to our wide international audience and further progress toward acceptance and equality.

"Without question, love in its various permutations is what we need more of in this world."—Hugh M. Hefner

holly HOXTER

Model **@PLAYMATEHOLLYHOXTER**

Photography by **JUSTIN E. DEAN | @JUSTINDEANPHOTOS**
HMUA **HOLLY HOXTER | @PLAYMATEHOLLYHOXTER**

Such an honour to have you feature in our December issue!Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Absolutely! Playboy is one of the most revered magazines to be featured in period as a model. It definitely gave me an extra boost of confidence knowing everyone would be bringing their A game to set.

Tell us something surprising about you?
I was a farmgirl growing up. I actually raised pigs and did the whole 4-H thing.

Describe yourself in one sentence.
I'm not comfortable settling and I'm always striving to be better.

What are some of the things you enjoy doing in your free time, any interesting hobbies?
I'm a long time gym rat and recently I've been experimenting with yoga as well as meditation. I'd have to say one of my favorite things to do though is volunteering at the local animal shelter.

What Is your biggest turn on?
Sense of humor, looks dont matter quite as much if you take life too seriously. I like someone that can keep me laughing but a nice tan and some abs doesn't hurt.

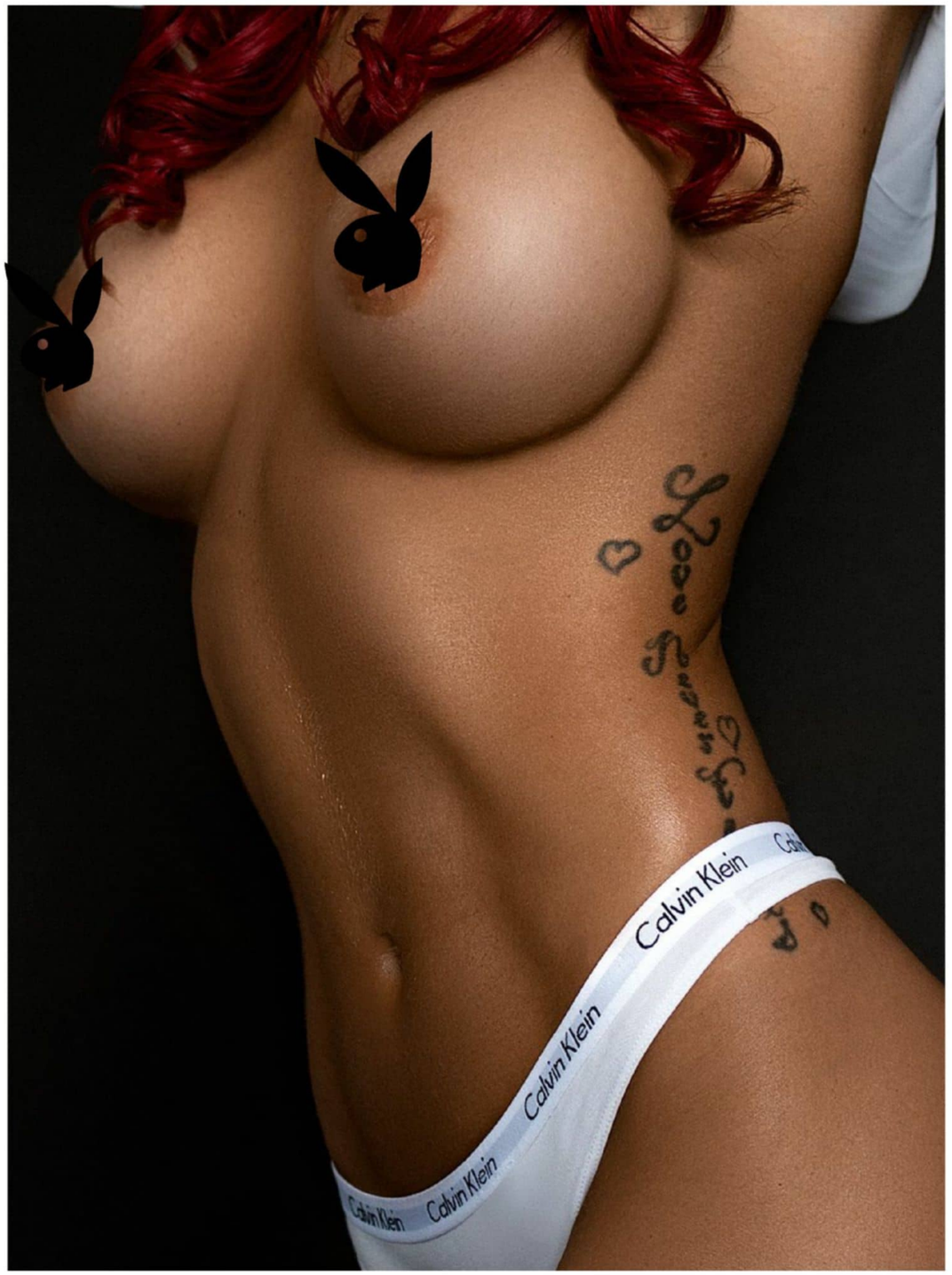
2020 has been an incredibly challenging year for us all, what has kept you busy throughout the pandemic?
Yeah 2020 has certainly been one for the books. I quarantined for over 2 months and like many others the pandemic has greatly affected how often I shoot. Luckily aside from modeling I also own a successful business that hasn't been hindered despite covid. I'm very fortunate to be in the situation I'm in.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
I think becoming comfortable in my own skin was the most challenging. You're always going to be your own worst critic but being able to like what you see in your photos is a huge confidence booster and kind of a game changer.

What are your plans for the upcoming year?
I'm really hoping that the world will start recovering and go back to some semblance of normalcy. I'll obviously be shooting but more importantly I've become involved in some activism so this year I want to continue protesting and making sure I'm on the right side of history. #BLM

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
I know right now things seem out of control and more divisive than ever. If we all could try and treat people the way we'd like to be treated it would fix a lot of my country's and the world's problems. I know it all sounds a bit cliché but we're all in this life together... Why not make it as pleasant an experience as we can!

Calvin Klein


Calvin Klein

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Playboy Interview
ELTON JOHN

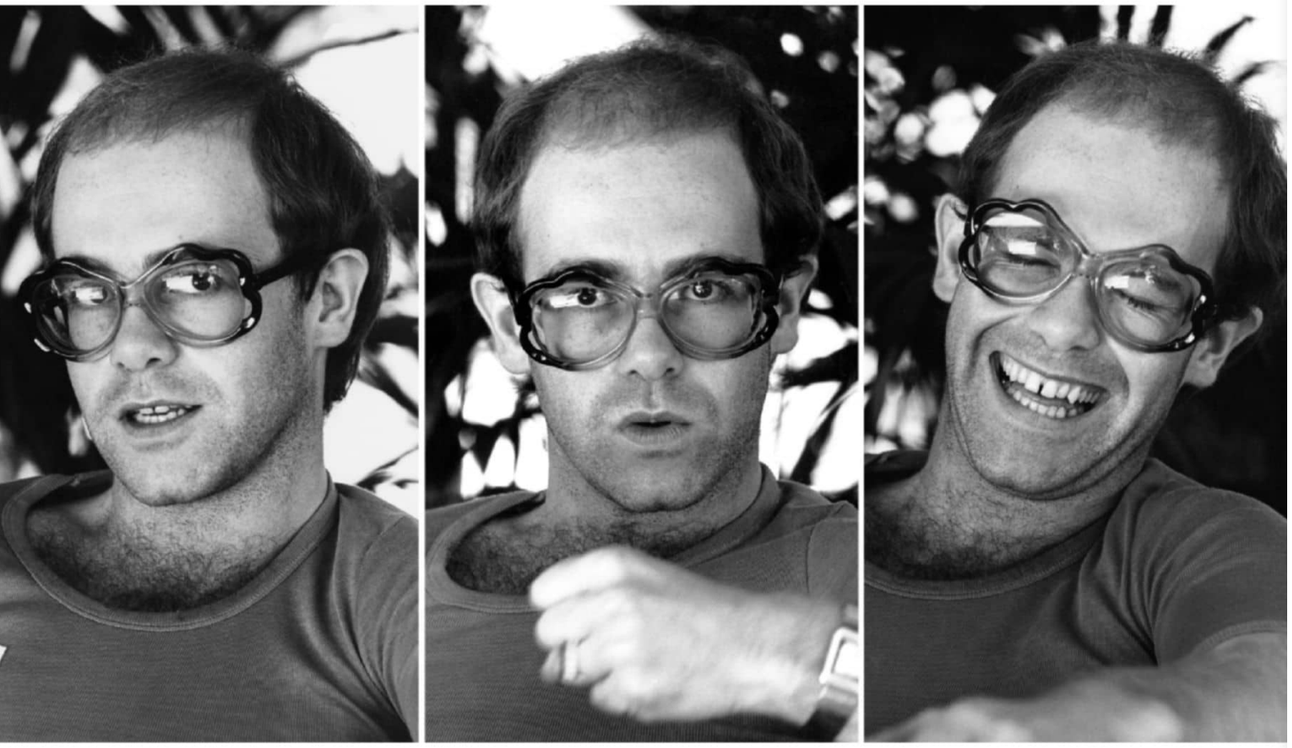
A candid conversation with the unlikeliest, flashiest pop star of them all

INTERVIEW BY **EUGENIE ROSS-LEMING, DAVID STANDISH** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TERRY O'NEILL**

Five years ago, Elton John was just another schlub like the rest of us. He was broke half the time, he was shorter even than Robert Redford, his hair was already beginning to thin, he was usually more plump than he liked and he wore glasses as thick as Coke-bottle bottoms. Hardly what you'd call a head start in the Rock Star Derby; he would have stumped any To Tell the Truth panel asked to make the real next Mick Jagger please stand up.

Last year he made $7,000,000—and did the impossible: released an album, Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy, that entered the charts at number one and shipped platinum—music-biz jargon for $1,000,000 worth of sales—overnight. Nobody had ever done both before—not the Beatles, the Stones, Sinatra, John Denver. Then, a couple of months ago, he promptly topped himself with Rock of the Westies, which shipped $1,400,000 and again entered the charts at number one.

Elton has become the biggest thing ever to hit the music business, partly because he seems to appeal to—or at least not alienate—all sorts of different people. Teenyboppers adore him; people who would be moved to murder by Led Zeppelin don't go for their shotguns when they hear him; and



even Rolling Stone sometimes likes what he does—according to its lights, anyway. That's why his string of singles lighting up the charts stretched uninterrupted for nearly four years, broken only briefly last fall, a record topped only by—can you guess?—Pat Boone. Converting that into plastic, it means nearly 35,000,000 singles have sold world-wide; and his 13 albums are somewhere in the 40,000,000 range, which makes it easy to understand the vinyl shortage. All that vinyl in turn converts, along with touring and little asides like being the platformed Pinball Wizard in the film version of Tommy, into $7,000,000 annually, which in turn converts into a $1,000,000 house in Beverly Hills, another outside London, 200 pairs of shoes, eyeglasses of every shade and outrageous configuration, his own record company, a budding art collection of elegant ceramic deco ladies, more singles and albums than he can count, jukeboxes, pinball machines—whatever gleams next in his eye.

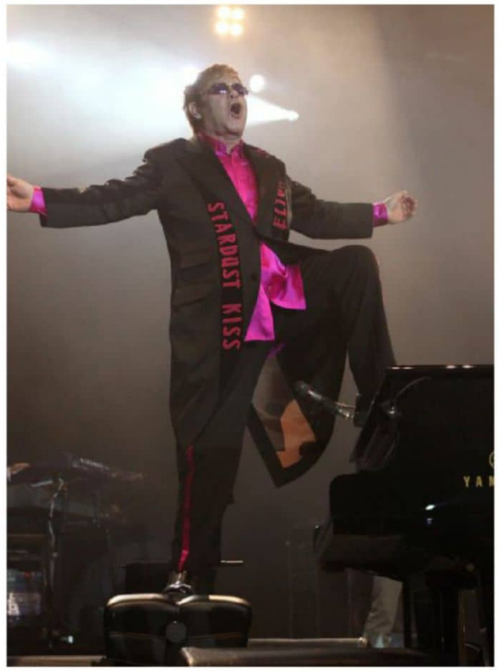
But in August of 1970 he was another unknown here. That changed in a week. On his first trip to America, he played the Troubadour in Los Angeles to audiences consisting mostly of the rock press and assorted music-biz types—a group of people who generally strive mightily to be as jaded and blasé as they are sun-tanned and lean. This time they all went berserk. In a famous review that launched Rocket Man into the skies, Robert Hilburn of the Los Angeles Times began: m"Rejoice. Rock music, which has been going through a rather uneventful period lately, has a new star. He's Elton John, a 23-year-old Englishman whose United States debut…was, in almost every way, magnificent." Back here in colder regions, we thought at first that all of them had been out in the sun too long. His first American album, Elton John, was all gloomy and doomy, with a brooding, poetic portrait of him on the front and strings to boot—not bad, but not our idea of rock m'n' roll. What were those people hollering?

We found out when first we saw him live, Mr. Hyde incarnate, pounding the piano like Little Richard possessed, jumping around on top of it wearing a sequined something or other and a feather boa and flashing neon sunglasses and God knows what else, manic and sweating, forcing the energy to levels higher and higher…and, yes, that was rock p'n' roll.

In the years since, we have watched him become, in the astronomy of the hype wizards, a megastar (better and more durable than a nova or a supernova, with their depressing implications of grandly dying light). And as that's happened, we've all heard more and more about his life out of the studio and offstage, when the Alice in Wonderland costumes are back in the closet:

His passion for tennis, and Billie Jean King as a partner; his long-distance collaboration with lyricist Bernie Taupin, who's written almost every word that Elton's made famous; popping up onstage to jam with the Rolling Stones; stark tabloid pictures of him decked out in spangles and fur at some fancy L.A. bash, his arm around Bob Dylan or Cher.

It seemed a good time to get his version of it all, find out how it all looked from the roller coaster. So we sent freelancer Eugenie Ross-Leming and Staff Writer David Standish (the same team that got Cher to say all those surprising things in last October's interview) to talk with him in his newly bought mansion up in the canyon hills. As Eugenie told us about it:



"Nine a.m. is too early to talk to anyone other than the milkman, let alone an anointed megastar, but with our rented Dodge overheating and our own heads in that peculiar brain-baked state that hits you in Southern California, we headed east on Sunset toward Elton's Benedict Canyon home. We followed PR man Dick Grant's secret and thorough instructions and continued our cruise up streets lined with palm trees sprouting along the curbs like hormone-infused pineapples. The canyon road steepened and close to the top, right below Alice Cooper's place—which had mysteriously burned down the previous night—was Elton's house. It's Moorish, with a high wall in front and an arched walkway, a fountain and lush greenery—sort of an Alhambra a go-go.

"We talked with him by the pool, under a Bedouin-style enclosure. Coffee and cookies kept us going, although Elton had already played several sets of tennis before our arrival. We talked about superstardom, sex, drugs, politics, music, and just why he is where he is—living the laid-back life in a house smelling of bougainvillaea and Twenties decadence, with the ghost of Garbo listening in his gazebo—and, of course, where he's going from here. We started by asking him, well, why him?"

PLAYBOY: You were recently voted Rock Personality of the Year. Why do you think people are so fascinated by you?
JOHN: Most people are nosy.

PLAYBOY: Any other reasons occur to you?
JOHN: Well, most people think I've got so much money, more than I really have. Hell, Paul Simon has more money than me. He's into his own publishing. But people are fascinated by anyone who's got money.
PLAYBOY: Some press reports estimate that you make $7,000,000 a year, which is a healthy allowance.
JOHN: I wouldn't say that. I probably flaunt it more than anyone else. I spend lots on myself. That's probably why I got that Rock Personality thing, g'cause I'm the only one who spends money. You forget about the quiet rich—at least you can gossip about me. I dress for it.
PLAYBOY: Yes, you do. Would flamboyant be too strong a word?
JOHN: Oh, I just like to get up and have a lark. I do it tongue in cheek with an g"up yours" attitude. I love people who expect me to wear great, feathery costumes—and I do it. It's like an actor getting into his costume for his part. I don't really feel the part until I'm into whatever I'm going to wear.

I'm pretty well making up for lost time. Not having had a real teenage life, I'm living those 13-to-19 years now. Mentally I may be 28, but somewhere half of me is still 13. That may be why I dress like a kid onstage. I know I look ridiculous sometimes, absolutely idiotic, but remember, when I started, I was quite rotund. I mean, I'm not exactly your normal teenage idol.

PLAYBOY: What makes you say that?
JOHN: For one thing, I'm quite aware that my hair's falling out—which is a real drag, because it didn't happen to the rest of my family. It must be because I was a silly cunt and dyed my hair a lot. So, since I've just discovered I don't want to be bald, I might have a hair transplant. It's just a matter of going down there with the courage to say, g"I want some more hair, please."
PLAYBOY: The rock press ought to have quite a time with that bit of news. Given your enormous publicity, what's the worst thing you've read about yourself?
JOHN: Well, let's clear up that incident with the Rolling Stones.
PLAYBOY: You mean the one reported in Rolling Stone magazine—that you barged on stage during the Stones tour and they weren't exactly happy about it?
JOHN: Yes. Here's what happened: Mick Jagger asked me to sit in on g"Honky Tonk Woman." I did and then left the stage to watch the show. Later, this roadie gets me and says Billy Preston wants me to join them. So I did. Then I read in Rolling Stone how Keith Richards was pissed that I wouldn't split the stage. I'm fed up with those damn fucking lies. They don't get their fucking facts right. Rolling Stone is becoming the National Enquirer of rock m'n' roll, and they have no sense of humor whatever.

Now, Creem magazine I adore. They have a sense of humor. They run some very good pieces, and often you'll read something about yourself that's entirely insulting but very funny. In their poll this year, I figured in every section. Asshole of the Year, Hero of the Year, Rip-off of the Year.… I really liked that, because it was funny.
PLAYBOY: What are some of the more bizarre rumors about you?
JOHN: There's one guy who writes for the Daily Express; he's got a gossip column. He's printed a couple of things about me—they've not been nasty or anything, they've just been absolute rubbish. When Evel Knievel was supposed to jump that canyon in the rocket, I was supposedly by his side, singing the national anthem. There I was, sitting in my house, going, Oh, yeah? And silly stuff like having my head superimposed on someone else's body or headlines like m"Elton Loves Ann-Margret" or "Elton Elopes with Cher." Well, Cher's eloped with everyone. The National Star wrote that I'd become an egomaniac when I broke up the band and said I believed after my role in Tommy that I was the world's biggest film star. At that time, I was hiding behind the walls of my Hollywood mansion. Not even my servants knew where I was.
PLAYBOY: Does that stuff piss you off?
JOHN: The things that upset me are the lies. I get very mad at people saying I'm a four-chord musician, with only a four-chord style. I was trying to think of one song I'd written with only four chords in it but couldn't come up with one. That upsets me. I hate trash magazines. People believe them, that's the thing about it.… When I read something in the National Star which is absolute rubbish, I say, m"Well, how dare they print that?" But then I'll go on to the next page and read something about someone else and I'll go, Hmmm…did they really do that? I mean, I'm the first person to get sucked in. But some of them are really sickening. People behind gossip magazines should be run off the street, tied up in stocks, and everyone should throw bad cabbages at them. I'll lead the way!

> "I refuse to become a recluse. And there are inconveniences to stardom, but you just put up with them."

PLAYBOY: Do the rumors and publicity make you want to hide, get away?
JOHN: I refuse to become a recluse. And there are inconveniences to stardom, but you just put up with them. If I get stopped for autographs 1,700 times a day, then I get stopped. I'm certainly not gonna shut myself away; I still go out and buy my own groceries. But crazy things can happen. One day recently, I woke up and there was this chick sitting on the bed right next to me. I'm a bit blind without my glasses. I said, m"Who are you?" And she said, "Oh, you don't know me." She'd gotten in without a key. Christ, it could have been someone with a fucking gun.
PLAYBOY: How did she get your address?
JOHN: The CIA should have the sources these kids have. We never told anyone where I live. Eight people have the phone number, and still it's gotta be changed every two weeks.

Another weird thing is the fans' morbid curiosity. Like, the other night Alice Cooper's house burned down. And people are driving up with their girlfriends and asking, p"Can we park?" I mean, it's fucking sick. People just want to see what's going down. They probably don't believe you go to the toilet.

ELTON JOHN

YAMAHA

From Riots *to* Recognition:

Celebrate Stonewall Day *With* Geena Rocero

At 1:20 A.M. on June 28, 1969, eight police officers stormed into the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village gay bar that welcomed drag queens, trans folks, sex workers and other outsiders. It was a routine raid; cross-dressing was then criminalized. The officers started lining up patrons outside to be transported to the precinct.

As the police began inappropriately frisking and aggressively shoving the detainees, a crowd gathered, throwing pennies and beer bottles at the police cars. Others formed a chorus line and began high-kicking and singing in protest. The chaos soon devolved into a brawl between the quickly amassing LGBTQ crowd and the authorities. Outnumbered, the police barricaded a small group of employees and patrons in the bar and waited for backup, which eventually arrived.

Our August 2019 Playmate joins the team behind Stonewall Day to honor LGBTQ progress, advocate on behalf of marginalized individuals and salute the trans activists who made history in 1969

BY **TORI LYNN ADAMS**

But it was a major turning point. Queer New Yorkers protested again the next night and on several subsequent occasions. Overnight many in the city's LGBTQ community went from a relatively private and unseen existence in which they quietly visited underground bars where they could be themselves to storming the streets and very publicly demanding their legal rights and protections. Eventually known as the Stonewall riots, these protests catalyzed the LGBTQ movement.

Exactly one year after the original Stonewall protest, the first pride parade was organized to commemorate the landmark event, celebrate the LGBTQ community and highlight the need for laws to protect queer rights. Every year since, LGBTQ communities have organized events in June to honor those who stood up for their rights at Stonewall and to raise awareness of the ongoing struggle for equality.

Stonewall Day was born in 2018, launched by Pride Live, a national nonprofit organization that elevates awareness and support for the LGBTQ community. This year the celebration will take place June 26 (one P.M. to three P.M. EDT) via a livestream, and it will highlight LGBTQ voices and performers such as Hayley Kiyoko, as well as allies including Demi Lovato, Barack Obama and Chelsea Clinton.

Serving as national chair for the event is August 2019 Playmate Geena Rocero, who is focusing on organizing, fundraising and amplifying the reach of the program. Rocero, no stranger to activism, chatted with me this week about intersectionality, resiliency, what Stonewall Day means to her and much more.

PLAYBOY: Unjust police raids and police violence targeting the LGBTQ community sparked the Stonewall riots. Sadly, police violence is still an ongoing problem for many marginalized groups, especially BIPOC and trans people.

ROCERO: The Stonewall riots are absolutely connected to what has been happening with Black Lives Matter over the past couple years. Police brutality is exactly what the queer community was fighting against at the Stonewall Inn in 1969. Queer people, specifically queer people of color, were being targeted by the police when they were out walking on the street or when they were at LGBTQ-friendly bars just having fun in a safe space. Back then, there was an informal "three-item rule" that was used to police the outfits of trans and gender-nonconforming people. Trans women couldn't wear more than three feminine items. Eventually they got tired of not being recognized as women, so they fought back.

It's also important to note that there were a lot of other LGBTQ-led riots leading up to Stonewall, including the Cooper Do-Nuts riot in Los Angeles in 1959, the Dewey's Restaurant sit-in in Philadelphia in 1965, the Compton's Cafeteria riot in San Francisco in 1966 and a handful more. Many of these historic moments were influenced by the civil rights protests that were happening around the same time.

PLAYBOY: What does it mean to you to serve as the national chair for Stonewall Day this year?

ROCERO: Last year was my very first time being involved with Stonewall Day; I served as an ambassador and I hosted an event inside the Stonewall bar with my trans sister Blossom Brown for the 50th anniversary of Stonewall.

This year Diana Rodriguez, the founder of Pride Live and creator of Stonewall Day, approached me and asked me to be the national chair. I told her, 'I'm only going to get involved if I'm not the only trans person of color in this.' I leveraged my platform to get more trans people of color involved. It wasn't just like, Oh, we're going to center you because it's the right time to. It was about the power of our voices and having people like Diana believe in that power. It's time to center black and brown voices within the movement.

I was honored to host Stonewall Day last year and I'm so excited to be the 2020 national chair. I mean, are you kidding? It's crazy for me to wrap my head around. Growing up in the Philippines, I never believed I would have my legal rights as a woman recognized—I had internalized a very colonized mind-set. When I came to America and began coming into my political consciousness, I began to realize the power in my perspective as a person of color, as a trans person, as an immigrant and as someone who is from a poor, working-class background. I realized I could effect change both at the interpersonal level in the relationships I have with people and also at the political and systemic levels. Stonewall Day is such a great opportunity for me to continue doing that.

PLAYBOY: Last year it was announced that Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, two trans activists that led the charge at Stonewall, would be honored with a monument in New York. What does their legacy mean to you as a trans woman of color?

ROCERO: Thank God for the archivists who elevated their stories. Tourmaline, a filmmaker and activist and a black trans woman, has brought Martha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera into the public consciousness more by digging up a lot of archival film, images and documents about them.

The big question is, Why are people just beginning to learn about them? I think it has a lot to do with trans people of color always existing on the margins of the LGBTQ community. The LGBTQ community has been centered around a gay white middle-class cisgender point of view for quite a while, even though trans people of color have been doing a lot of the work.

PLAYBOY: People at the outer rings of the LGBTQ movement are still left out of the conversation. How can we make the LGBTQ community more inclusive?

ROCERO: Black and brown trans people have been ignored by the mainstream LGBTQ community, and we have had to rely on each other to survive. We become a chosen family, and we support each other when we are rejected by our family, when we experience violence, when we can't access jobs (and end up having to do sex work) or health care (which means we have to pay a fortune for our hormones) or when someone tests HIV positive. Because we face all these things, we are resilient. We are used to fighting for our existence because we have no other choice.

The most marginalized people are sometimes oppressed by other marginalized groups. I think that is why the notion of intersectionality is so important. You have to look inward and analyze your internalized transphobia, misogyny, racism, classism, etc., in order to fully understand intersectionality. The idea of intersectionality has existed for a while, but the application of the theory into action requires a lot of nuance.

Stonewall was led by sex workers, drag queens, genderqueer people and black and brown trans people, like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera; unfortunately these groups of people are still disproportionately targeted by violence. It's very traumatic to constantly have to worry about your safety. We have to start looking out for one another beyond our own identity markers.

PLAYBOY: How can we make pride parades and protests more effective in galvanizing change?

ROCERO: We had to rethink pride celebrations this year because of COVID-19, but it hasn't stopped us from celebrating and speaking up. It goes to show you how resilient the LGBTQ community is. People are still organizing and fund-raising for this. For Stonewall Day we had to pivot from a live event, where we could gather as a community, to a livestream.

Moving forward, we have to take a look at LGBTQ leadership and rethink the voices we are centering. We have to think about the most marginalized individuals in our community and support them and amplify their voices.

" You have to look inward and analyze your **internalized transphobia, misogyny, racism, classism, etc.,** in order to achieve intersectionality. "

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PLAYBOY: The year of the Stonewall riots, 1969, felt like a pivotal one for America; in addition to other civil rights protests and student-led anti-Vietnam War protests, two members of the Black Panther Party were killed in their home by Chicago police. It feels like 2020 could be another pivotal year. With the coronavirus pandemic in the background, we have the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the impending 2020 election. How do we keep this energy and activism going?

ROCERO: We have to slow down and take care of ourselves if we want to keep this going. I have to recognize when I'm feeling anxious or exhausted. You have to find a release for the emotional labor you're enduring.

It's important to develop a network of people you can trust and open up to, people who will support you. COVID-19 has exposed how vulnerable our health care system is. We have to take care of each other. We can't go back to normal after this; we can't go back to the way it was.

PLAYBOY: What makes you feel celebratory right now, and what makes you feel disheartened?

ROCERO: It's been an insane roller coaster of emotion, from coronavirus to the murders of black trans women to the Trump administration attacking trans health care to the Supreme Court decision protecting LGBTQ people in the workplace. I'm hopeful and celebratory but also discouraged and heartbroken. I think these things can exist at the same time; it's not a binary. We have to get rid of binary thinking—that's a big goal for me.

Aimee Stephens, one of the plaintiffs in the Supreme Court case, passed away about a month before the ruling. It's bittersweet. Stephens had been fired after coming out as trans. She lost her health insurance. She died so that we could have our rights recognized. The Supreme Court win is a good step forward, but there is still so much work to be done.

PLAYBOY: What are some ways to meaningfully support LGBTQ people?

ROCERO: After seeing the success of #ShareTheMicNow, where white influencers let black organizers take over their Instagram channels, I got together with Winter Breeanne and Ericka Claudio who recently founded #PassThePlatform. The goal is to create something more inclusive for trans women. Natalie Portman and Nina Dobrev recently got involved.

There are so many important black trans-led organizations that people should become familiar with if they want to support LGBTQ rights. Contributing money is really important, but not everyone is able; the least you can do is to uplift, amplify and support these leaders. Follow them on social media. Share their stories and Instagram handles. It's time to listen up. Some of my favorite black trans organizations and leaders are Ianne Fields Stewart of the Okra Project; Ceyenne Dorsohow of G.L.I.T.S. Inc.; Asanni of For the Gworls; Elle Hearns of the Marsha P. Johnson Institute; LaSaia Wade of Brave Space Alliance; and the BTFA collective.

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT STONEWALL DAY 2020

Stonewall Day is a global campaign to elevate awareness and support for the Stonewall legacy and the continuing fight for full LGBTQ equality. In partnership with Pride Media and WarnerMedia, the 2020 event will be a worldwide livestream event to raise critical funds for LGBTQ organizations most affected by COVID-19. From around the world activists, supporters, celebrities and influencers will join the broadcast, including Christian Siriano, Hayley Kiyoko, Lilly Wachowski, Demi Lovato, Jonny Beauchamp, Chelsea Clinton, Dustin Lance Black, Katy Perry, Donatella Versace, Taylor Swift, Kesha, Barack Obama and Stonewall Day National Chair Geena Rocero. You can tune in to Stonewall Day on June 26 at one P.M. EDT.

To learn more, please visit the Pride Live website. According to Pride Live, some of its beneficiaries are:

Trans Lifeline connects trans people to the community, support and resources they need to survive and thrive. Its peer-support hotline and microgrants are particularly essential during the COVID-19 era, as trans people disproportionately face isolation and economic insecurity.

Brave Space Alliance is the first Black trans-led LGBTQ center on the South Side of Chicago, dedicated to creating and providing affirming, culturally competent, for-us-by-us resources, programming and services for LGBTQ individuals on the South and West sides of the city.

The TransLatin@ Coalition advocates across the United States to ensure the voices of trans Latinas are heard. The coalition's purpose is to address the unique and specific challenges and needs of the U.S. trans Latina community.

The Ally Coalition provides critical support for grassroots nonprofit organizations dedicated to bettering the lives of LGBTQ youth.

Playboy Interview

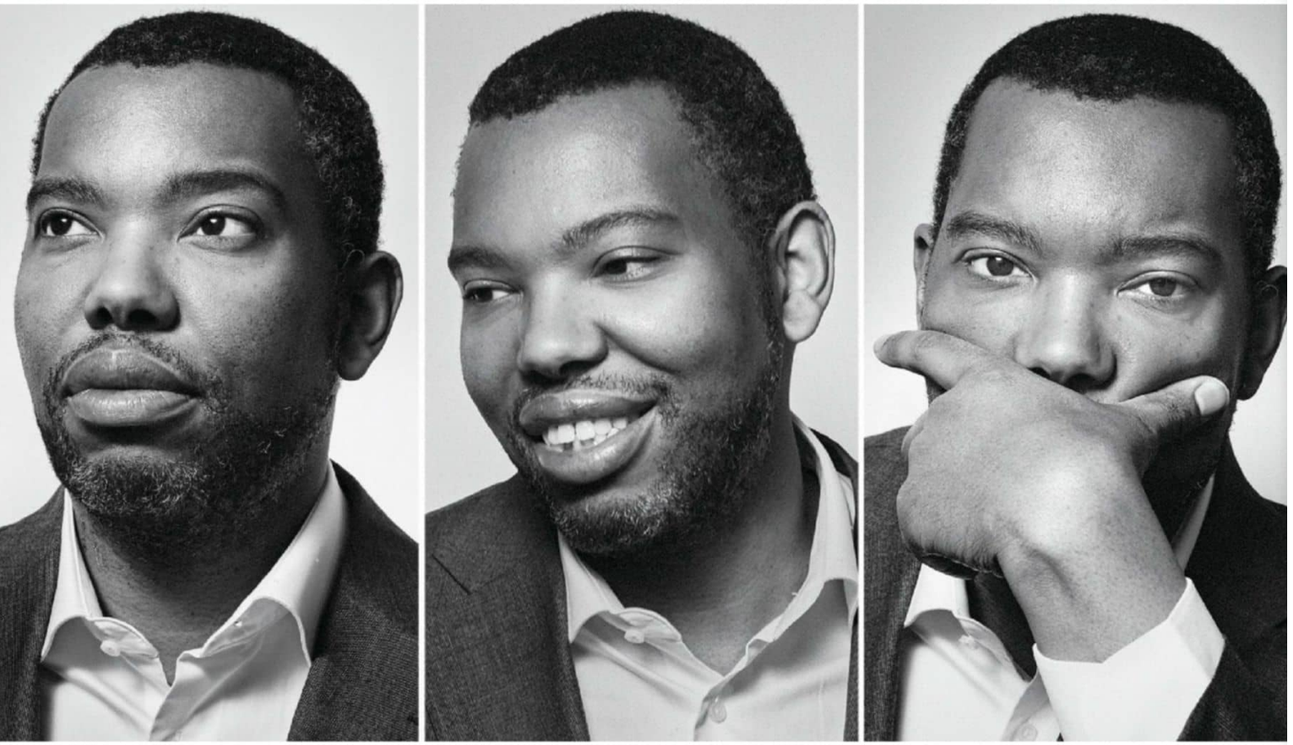
TA-NEHISI COATES

A candid conversation with the public intellectual, comic-book writer and all-around brilliant American on rap, racism, reparations and more

INTERVIEW BY **BOMANI JONES** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JORK WEISMANN**

Making the case that the United States government owes black people for what it has done to them is an unlikely way to become a household name, but that's what Ta-Nehisi Coates did two years ago. "The Case for Reparations" was the cover story of the June 2014 issue of The Atlantic, and the publication says the piece brought more unique visitors to its site in a single day than any other magazine story it had ever run. Coates's thorough defense of a revolutionary idea became a star turn.

Then came Between the World and Me, a 176-page essay that doubles as a letter to his now 15-year-old son. In it, Coates covers police brutality, spirituality and coming-of-age in ways that capture how much has and hasn't changed since his adolescence. Focusing on all the things that threaten black bodies and the fear produced by that condition, he soberly reports on the struggles inextricably linked to blackness, trading the traditional tale of freedom and redemption for one supported by history instead of hope. The book was instantly hailed as a masterpiece, yielding its author a National Book Award and a MacArthur Fellowship and ending up as a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Coates went from simply being critically acclaimed to being compared to James Baldwin by no less an authority than Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison.



He's as shocked by all this as anyone else. A Kanye-esque college dropout sharing stages with some of the world's preeminent scholars just six years after losing three jobs in seven years? That would be enough to drive the average intellectual past the point of hubris. But not Coates, who seems unable to process his current success without keeping an intimate acquaintance with tougher times.

Ta-Nehisi Coates was born on September 30, 1975 in Baltimore and grew up on the west side of the city, the part of town made famous by HBO's The Wire. His first book, The Beautiful Struggle, tells the story of his upbringing, the product of a pan-African resistance to the toxicity of the 1980s—both the political rhetoric and the poison flooding the streets. After struggling through high school, Coates went to Howard University in Washington, D.C., where his father worked as a librarian. Although bright and well-read, the teacher's son wasn't a good student, and he left to pursue a career in journalism.

He bounced from job to job—fired from Philadelphia Weekly, "basically forced out" of The Village Voice, laid off from Time (nine years later he would appear on the Time 100 list)—before landing at The Atlantic in 2008, initially as a blogger. His posts were pointed, precise and parsimonious. The only side he consistently took was the one born of logic. He called out Barack Obama for his sweeping critiques of black America the same way he responded to similar sentiments from the right. He matter-of-factly confronted questions of race, rejecting optimistic narratives and basing his conclusions on centuries of irrefutable American history. That work helped build trust and a following that made "The Case for Reparations" possible, which led to Ta-Nehisi Coates becoming more prominent than he thinks he should be.

When we're wrong, it's craziness, but when they're wrong, it's... Harvard.

He's thirsty for challenges. That's why he agreed to write a series of Black Panther comics for Marvel and why he currently lives in Paris. His approach is self-assured but short on delusion, qualities reflected in his demeanor as well as his work.

ESPN's Bomani Jones met Coates at a café in Paris's third arrondissement, across the street from the apartment he shares with his wife and son. They talked over dinner and resumed the conversation the next morning at a Latin Quarter hotel. "He's uncommonly warm and gracious when he's comfortable, with a big laugh and frequent smile," Jones says. "Some of that faded when he talked about harder times, but discomfort never stopped him from saying what he felt. He's similar in person to how he comes across on the page: honest, measured and emotive—and as brilliant as most of us think he is, which is more than he thinks of himself."

PLAYBOY: When did you realize you had become somebody?

COATES: When I came to The Atlantic I'd been writing for 12 years. The Atlantic is seen as this arbiter of sophisticated ideas, well ensconced in the mainstream consensus, and then they bring in this dude. I wasn't making the case for reparations back then, but I was saying that sort of shit. I could see the reaction, and it built a little bit, and then when "The Case for Reparations" came out—holy shit. But even then it was like, "This is one story, and I'll go back to my life." I thought Between the World and Me would hit people who read shit. When we did BookExpo America, the book-trade joint, there was a line of people to get the galleys. I was like, "What the fuck?" And I knew it was some shit when somebody said to me on Twitter, "Oh, you've got to be a celebrity to get this book?" [laughs] Who the fuck wants a galley? And then when you've gotten love from Toni Morrison—it still didn't hit me. When I started seeing the reaction to it I thought, Oh, this is different.

PLAYBOY: Having Toni Morrison compare you to James Baldwin sounds like a big deal.

COATES: Yeah, but when she said that, I feel like people misconstrued it. I felt her point was "It's a space I felt I was looking for, a certain kind of analysis that I'm not getting, and I got it from this book—not from everything he'll write after it, not from anything he wrote before. It's just this book." I mean, Baldwin is not just The Fire Next Time.

PLAYBOY: I took it as her saying "This dude might be the next Baldwin." Do you often downplay your work?

COATES: The Baldwin thing, for me, was intentional. I love The Fire Next Time. You've got this essay in book form; dude is using journalism, using first person, the history, the literary criticism, all just kind of mashed together. He's talking about the most essential conflict of his day. Now here we are in this era, and motherfuckers are uploading videos of people getting choked to death, beaten on the street, black president. This seems like the moment for that form. Where's that book? My editor said to me, "The road is littered with motherfuckers who tried to do that." My agent knew Baldwin. She said, "You just don't come across as a Jimmy." [laughs] But she said, "I think you can do it." I tried the first time; it did not work. Second time, did not work. Third time—we've got something there.

PLAYBOY: What happened between the second and third drafts?

COATES: Between the second and third time, I literally printed out every page, went sentence by sentence and came up with a completely different structure. I assigned each paragraph to each heading where I thought it should belong, then I sat down and typed the whole thing out just to run it through the machine again. So it's not that I'm downplaying it. It's hard to step back and think about it as a finished thing. The fact of the matter is I've got to go do that again, and then again, and then again, and each time different. I've got to do some other shit now, and it's got to be of that

caliber. It might fail, and there's no dishonor in failure.

PLAYBOY: Since the book has come out, what's the biggest change you've noticed?

COATES: The book has given me and my family a level of financial security I never thought we would have and thus the freedom to go out and think, Okay, how are we really going to go out here and do this now? At the same time, I didn't realize how much heat there was.

PLAYBOY: Some of that heat came from Cornel West, who basically said you were a neoliberal darling who wouldn't criticize Obama. Others, including author bell hooks, suggested the book was written more for white people than for your son.

COATES: The book couldn't have been out more than three days, and I saw this note. "Look, Cornel West is going after him." It was on a Facebook post, and it was clear it had almost nothing to do with the book. Then bell hooks and Kevin Powell got together and went after the book with some bullshit. It was like all the people I was reading in the 1990s were attacking the book. I was like, Damn, what the fuck is this?

PLAYBOY: You had become a figure.

COATES: Right. And so you lose yourself. They really are not talking about you. Glenn Loury was talking like, "Yeah, I only flipped through the first few pages, but this dude was bragging to his son about how he can find a gun." I wrote to him and was like, "Dude, you need to read the book. I didn't say none of that shit." My elders got their knives out. I don't want to say everybody, but people I'd really studied and learned from. It's like, That's what it is now?

If nothing ever changes, that does not relieve me of the responsibility to tell the truth as I see it.

PLAYBOY: Did any of the criticism hurt?

COATES: All of it hurt. I had criticized Cornel for going after Obama, but not in that sort of personal way. The bell hooks shit hurt because she was talking about my son. The Loury shit, that hurt. Eventually I figured out that they were aiming at the gaze of white folks. I didn't account for how much that shit controls everything. I can't tell you how many times I've gone somewhere and the question has been "What's up with white people reading your book?" It alters everything. You're talking about money right there. But I think on top of that it's the prestige part. "Oh, you're a MacArthur genius now?" Now people have to look at you a certain way and talk to you a certain way, and that has nothing to do with what you're actually saying. People start shouting out your name and they ain't even talking about you.

PLAYBOY: White people are not just reading it but have also gotten behind it. Is that hard to comprehend?

COATES: It's easy. The number of white people who read books is really small. I mean, what are we, a country of 300 million? Two hundred million white folks? They haven't read Between the World and Me. Another thing: A lot of the shit people think is crazy is not crazy at all in academia. If you talk to historians or sociologists and ask, "Is racism one of the most consistent themes in American history, without which you would have trouble conceiving of the country at all?" they say, "Hell, yeah. I would go further than that." Is this country reading its own historians? It was really radical in my folks' home, and I thought some of that shit was crazy. Then I started reading these historians. A lot of it wasn't crazy, and a lot of it was true. There are enough "elite" people in academia who can provide the evidence for it. You might not like how it sounds, but the consensus in academia is pretty clear. When I saw that? I ain't got to fight you with what's on 125th. I can fight you with your own people. That's Harvard and Yale. I've got your history department. Like that great Chuck D line, "You check out the books they own."

PLAYBOY: Did you get any pushback from people who'd worked on reparations for years about you becoming the face of that movement?

COATES: By and large people were extremely excited to see this taken seriously. This is what my pops and that generation fought for. This is what was supposed to happen. This is the fruit. The 1960s and 1970s, a lot of the shit they were saying, it's like a scientist who intuitively feels himself to be correct but doesn't have the science. "Everything I know about this tells me it's that way. I ain't got the scholarship, but I know what direction it's supposed to go." For the next generation, folks like us, we went off to school, read some things. I was able to bring to bear tools they didn't necessarily have. And it was like, "Everything you thought was intuitively correct? I got it now. You used to say this whole thing was built on slavery—got it. Footnoting and everything, we got it." How many black folks wanted to do something like this but just couldn't?

PLAYBOY: How was it growing up as a pan-African in the 1980s and 1990s?

COATES: I've always felt black, but I always felt a little outside that real black shit. "Come on, man, we don't celebrate Christmas, we don't celebrate Thanksgiving, we don't go to church." Really? That's what we're doing now? It became cool when I was 13, when Public Enemy came out.

PLAYBOY: And you had to carry that name.

COATES: Oh my God, that was the worst. I'm like, "Can I just get a normal name?" And then I went out in the world and realized this was a normal name. [laughs] I had a crush on a girl whose name was Mwaneisha. I knew plenty of girls with names like that. What was I supposed to say about that, you know?

PLAYBOY: Does the class difference between how you grew up and how your son is growing up ever worry you?

COATES: No. I feel like I learned certain stuff the way I grew up, and those things helped me later. But the amount of violence in black communities is just off the hook, so I think it's a net negative. You've got to put it on balance. I think everybody who goes through that says, "Well, I'm gonna toughen him up." See, these white folks ain't got to be tough. Tough is for people without money.

PLAYBOY: Is there anything related to race that you once believed and now look back on and say, "What was I thinking?"
COATES: Yeah, there are crazy things that I believed. That whole iceman thing was total bullshit.
PLAYBOY: I take it you're talking about Michael Bradley's book The Iceman Inheritance, which attributes white racism to, among other things, sexual maladaptation in Caucasians.
COATES: See, these motherfuckers believe shit now and argue on it. I've had these fights with Andrew Sullivan about IQ. That's his iceman. There's no science behind this shit. But see, you've got institutions and guns behind it, right? You've got a whole power structure behind it that allows them to stand on the crazy shit I could not go out on. When I went to Howard they were like, "Ain't no way you're going to leave here talking that shit." These motherfuckers get to go to Harvard and come out talking that shit. Charles Murray did this bubble study. Did you see that shit?
PLAYBOY: I did not.
COATES: How to determine whether you live in a bubble or not. It's totally based on white people. No black person would take that study and have it tell them anything about their life. This motherfucker got the backing of Washington. These motherfuckers just get to spout crazy. This cat Marty Peretz, who used to run The New Republic, was an active racist and bigot spouting the worst poison in the world. This guy is in high reaches of society, getting degrees from Harvard. My pops said this shit to me one time: "The African's right to be wrong is sacred." When we're wrong, it's craziness, but when they're wrong, it's…Harvard.
PLAYBOY: In your back-and-forths with Sullivan and Jonathan Chait, they seemed to be wondering what was wrong with you. What was your thought when people said you seemed down, when you believed you were dealing in facts?
COATES: That's what they say when they can't fight you. They abandon the whole thought of any sort of empirical, historical, evidence-based argument, and they say, "Well, I don't like where you're coming from." It's like if I tell you I have empirical evidence that the world is going to end in five days and you're like, "I don't like how that sounds. Why are you bumming me out?" That's something people apply to the dialogue around racism but they don't apply to other shit. Kathryn Schulz won a Pulitzer Prize for this incredible piece that basically says the Pacific Northwest is going to get hit by a huge tsunami that will kill a lot of people. It's the most pessimistic, dire shit you'd ever want to read. What if they said to Schulz, "You could sing us a song"? When people can't fight you, they say, "Why are you so pessimistic?" It's a different question than "Are you correct?"
PLAYBOY: You also wrote in the book about being an atheist. Did you have any reservations about sharing that?
COATES: No. I don't know why either.
PLAYBOY: I mean, you could say you worship a different god in America.
COATES: Right, you can be spiritual. It's difficult to explain my perspective in that book without talking about atheism. So much of the black perspective is built on this notion of transcendent spiritual victory, and I had to explain why I was estranged from that. You know what I mean? How I'm going to get around that. I've got to tell them; otherwise, it's not going to be true. There's another question: Why are all these black church people reading Between the World and Me? I mean, people are teaching the book in church. That I did not expect.
PLAYBOY: Do you worry about going further than your audience is ready to go?
COATES: No, because I wrote for 12 years and had no audience. I'm prepared for it to go. I loved writing before this and I will love writing after this. I loved it when it made no money. I love it now that it makes more money. I will love it when it goes back to making no money again. It's not for that. And the minute you let them take it from you, the minute it becomes for them, you are lost.

Part of the way racism works is through imagery, through reinforcing certain ideas. Symbols matter.

PLAYBOY: How good do you think you are at writing?
COATES: I'm a good writer. I think there are very few people who can do journalism, do history, form an argument, an argument with a brain, and then write in such a way that it gets at your heart also. I'm thinking about Isabel Wilkerson. I think of Nikole Hannah-Jones. I think Elizabeth Kolbert at The New Yorker is really good at that. I'm talking about making an argument that's simple, with all this evidence, and writing about it in a beautiful way. There are very few people who can do all of it at the same time, and that's because very few people actually try.

Coming up on hip-hop really taught me the beauty of poetry. Reading comic books taught me the beauty of poetry. Studying poetry after that, I had this obsession with how language sounded. Coming out of my household and being a history major at Howard gave me a deep appreciation for history. Working under David Carr as a journalist gave me a deep appreciation for actually going out and talking to people. So I had a variety of experiences, but it's not mystical. It's not in the genes or in the bones.
PLAYBOY: You've said that when you look at yourself in the mirror you see a guy who got fired three times. Do you think there will ever be a point when you'll look in the mirror and see the dude who changed the game with Between the World and Me?
COATES: No, because that remains to be seen. And the game could get changed back. Listen, I went and started this damn comic book, Black Panther, and it's like, Oh yeah, this is hard. Things don't just flow out of your brain. It's not like, Hey, I'm brilliant. Show up, paper right here, bam, another banger. No—you sit and you struggle with yourself and you stop cutting your hair. I'm not cutting my hair right now. You stop shaving, like I'm not shaving right now. You remember that you can fail. I've failed several times. The fact that everybody else don't see that don't give me the right to not see it.
PLAYBOY: Did you think when you said you were voting for Bernie Sanders that it would turn into a de facto endorsement?
COATES: No, I didn't see that coming at all. [*laughs*] I've got to be more self-aware. But after that, it became really hard to write about the election. I damn near can't write anything without people being like, "Oh, this dude is weighing in." I don't know why people say, "You're voting for Bernie Sanders; that enforces my vote for him." You need to think for yourself.
PLAYBOY: Has being in France changed the way you view yourself as an American?
COATES: France was the first place where that was the first thing people saw when I talked. It reminds me that the first thing they think in America is, Oh, you're black. Here, the first thing they think is, You're American, maybe black American. They're racist as hell, but the sociology that comes out of slavery is a little different from the sociology that comes out of colonialism. France colonized all sorts of people—Asian people, black people, whoever. So the relationship is a little different. It's not a good relationship. But America has a very specific thing with black people. Here, the people who get it the worst are actually the Muslims, so it's not like they're cured. But slavery did something to America; it did some shit.

PLAYBOY: Are you looking forward to going back to the States?
COATES: Yeah. And then coming back here. [*laughs*]
PLAYBOY: What do you miss?
COATES: My friends, mostly. My friends and my family.
PLAYBOY: Nothing particular to the country?
COATES: The country is the people to me, and I miss the people. There are things I don't have here that are very different but that I don't miss. I don't know if you'll see this over the next few days or whether you've seen it already, but America is a much freer place. France is actually maybe a culturally more conservative place. "We ain't open on Sunday. Deal with it. Period." In America, somebody's trying to make some money; somebody's always saying, "I'm open over here. What's up?" You know, my butcher ain't open on Monday. And during the week he shuts down from 12 to three. He works, like, 20 hours the whole week.
PLAYBOY: What role does hip-hop play in your work?
COATES: I always considered myself a failed MC. That was what I really wanted to do. I was listening to that old Quincy Jones album Back on the Block. Big Daddy Kane says, "Back up and give the brother room to let poetry bloom to whom it might concern or consume." I heard that and thought, Good God, there's so much in that. It's the kind of faux majesty of it, "to whom." It's actually really regal. I heard something like that as a kid, and it was like these cats were taking the language from its inventors and retrofitting it to explain their reality. Nas didn't need to go to Harvard, or even Howard, to become masterful in the use of language. I think great rappers, because of how stuff is structured, really understand on an intuitive level how to get across as much information as possible in the smallest amount of space.

In terms of literary inspirations, hip-hop's got to be number one, and I'm talking above actual literature. Aesthetically, it defines how I try to write. You really have to think hard about every single word. Probably a hundred years from now people will look back on something like Illmatic, some of that Wu-Tang stuff, some of the Kendrick stuff, some of the other stuff, and they're just going to be like, "Holy hell." You're talking some of the greatest wordsmiths of our age.
PLAYBOY: Have you been able to impart some of that to your son?
COATES: My son is doing it for me now. I did when he was younger, but music requires the time to actually dig, you know what I'm saying? He has always been open to stuff I play, but now he's the one who tells me, "Yo, you should check this out." He got me on the new Rihanna album. He's like, "Man, you really would like this."
PLAYBOY: So you trust his taste in music.
COATES: He has great taste in music. I don't know if it's because I was relatively young when he was born—I was 24—but I don't have that whole "Cut that off! I'm going to show you how we used to do it back in the day!" I took him to this foreign-language camp about a summer ago, and one of my great memories is just listening to his music all the way up there. It was good stuff too.

PLAYBOY: How is learning French going?
COATES: It's always hard. I'm in my fourth year of studying, and I think I speak like a four-year-old child, which is progress. My first summer here I actually took classes, and at the end I was like, I think I have some sort of brain injury. Coming back, it was a lot easier. I've had to go out and talk about the book. I can generally understand the questions from the person who's giving them to me, but I usually have the answers translated. And sometimes I actually give the answer in French.
PLAYBOY: That has to be humbling.
COATES: I think I seek out difficulty. At this point, when people are handing you things and giving you all these accolades, and you go somewhere and they're basically, "Who are you? You can't even talk to us." You know what I mean? Like, "You really ain't shit." It takes it back. I need that in my life.
PLAYBOY: With these recurring themes in history, how do you avoid writing about the same thing over and over?
COATES: You just don't write. I've been trying for the past two weeks to write about the 1994 Violent Crime Control Act without rewriting. I wrote "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration" back in October, and then when Bill Clinton went crazy——
PLAYBOY: When he was trying to defend his crime bill to Black Lives Matter protesters in Philadelphia earlier this year?
COATES: Yeah. I was sitting there trying to write, and I got about three paragraphs in and was like, This is deceptive. It's just saying the same shit. You said it, and either they heard you or they didn't. It's not up to you.
PLAYBOY: Does the fact that these things keep happening make you question the utility of your work?
COATES: No, because you have no control over that. Ida B. Wells went all through the South, reporting on lynchings and everything. Nothing changed, not in her lifetime. If nothing ever changes, that does not relieve me of the responsibility to tell the truth as I see it.
PLAYBOY: Some would make the argument that you have become the voice on these issues. How does that make you feel?
COATES: It makes me sad that people don't read more black writers. I want the notion of there having to be "the voice" for black folks completely obliterated. There is no one voice on climate change. There's no one person on sports. I think that allows for a kind of laziness among nonblack people who don't want to read other people's shit. It saves them from having to compare me with other writers who are not black. It allows them to say, "You're king of the blacks over here." The journalism I'm making stands up with any of these white folks you want to put up. If you want to have a conversation about where I stand in my field, we can talk about that. I'm black, very proud to be black, standing within the tradition of other black writers. That's my culture, that's my ethnicity, that's my struggle, that's my tradition, that's my literature, but don't use that as an excuse not to explore that tradition.
PLAYBOY: Are you comfortable with being thought of as perhaps the best voice on these issues?
COATES: No, because when people say that, they are often unqualified. Very few black people say that to me. Why do we think about black folks like this? I'm practicing a craft, and if you want to talk about best, compare me to other craftsmen. I'm interested in a particular question, but why would you compare me only to other people who are interested only in that question?
PLAYBOY: When was the last time somebody important to you fundamentally disagreed with something you'd written or done?
COATES: I wrote a column defending the use of the word nigger, and my buddy Ben and his wife, Janai—they're mentioned in the book—were like, "It's total bullshit."
PLAYBOY: Why is that the thing that gets people so charged up?
COATES: The nigger thing? I understand if you're black and you say, "Man, I had white people call me this shit all my life. They called me this shit when they hit me upside the head, and I don't want to hear it." I understand that. But that ain't everybody's experience. I've never had a white person call me a nigger. I had somebody call me le négre here in France, but I was 38 years old and I couldn't have cared less. It didn't mean anything. So not all of us come out of that experience.
PLAYBOY: How would you describe the eight years of Obama's presidency?
COATES: I think he did a tremendous job, and I say that with all my criticism of how he talks about black folks and how he talks to black folks. I say that with all my criticism of the morality or the lack of morality in terms of drone warfare. You're not voting for a civil rights leader; you're voting for a president of the United States within the boundaries of what presidents do. And within the boundaries of what presidents do, he's easily the greatest president in my lifetime. I don't think people understand what he had to navigate. It's a hard job already. You've got people on TV—and this is just the small end of it—on the internet, everywhere, sending out pictures of you and your wife looking like apes. You've got officials in the opposing party e-mailing pictures of watermelon patches in front of the White House. You have an opposition party where somewhere on the order of 50 or 60 percent don't think you are legally president. You're giving the State of the Union address and some white dude from South Carolina stands up and yells, "You lie." Just open, blatant disrespect. You say the most sensible things in the world and people lose their mind, almost scuttling your top agenda in terms of legislation. You've got to be a certain motherfucker to be able to manage all that in your head. Their leading presidential candidate right now is the person who claimed our president was born somewhere else and asked to see his grades. You're dealing with a party where racism is a significant undercurrent. I mean, whew.
PLAYBOY: Were you surprised by the level of obstruction?
COATES: I was surprised by how much his very presence drew out the racism in the country. I didn't know these folks were basically going to double down. There's stuff we don't even remember. In the 2012 Republican primary, Newt Gingrich just comes out and calls this dude a food-stamp president. I mean, just says it. This is a respectable figure in American politics right now. Five years from now, people will be looking back on this presidency and talking about how great the times were. Ten years from now, Republicans will be talking about how whoever is the Democratic nominee at that point is not like Obama and how magisterial Obama was. Twenty-five, 30 years from now, they're going to put his face on the money, if we still have money. And 50 years from now—it might not even take that long—he will be considered one of the greatest presidents in American history.
PLAYBOY: Did you have to reconcile what you wanted Obama to be with what he turned out to be?
COATES: No. I think my politics are significantly more radical than that of most people in the black community. That the first black president would not have my politics or my way of addressing folks is not particularly surprising to me. That does not relieve me of my responsibility to say, "This is wrong and here's why." But I understand where he's coming from. I think Obama loves black people. I think he likes being black. Is it a mistake that he's attracted to Chicago—for my money, the capital of black America—and participates within the institutions there? That he married a woman who is from there and lives there? I don't think you do any of that without having a sincere affection for black folks. You can feel somebody has a sincere appreciation for black folks and just think they're dead wrong.
PLAYBOY: What's the importance to you of having a black family in the White House?
COATES: That shit replaced The Cosby Show, didn't it? I think it's important, because culture is important. If having no black family there was important, then having one there is important. When you're the most famous black folks in the country—I mean, I don't want to fall too much into the romance of it, but imagery matters. That's the most public picture of us for eight years. That has to have some impact on white people, and I'm talking about white children. Part of the way racism works is through imagery, through reinforcing certain ideas. It's not policy, but symbols matter.
PLAYBOY: The women in your life don't get mentioned much in your books. Is there a reason for that?
COATES: Well, the woman in my life is in the second book. She has her own life, and she deserves that. The book is dedicated to her. I would not be here without her. But she deserves her space. I don't particularly enjoy all the attention, and I know just from talking to her that she would not enjoy it. To some extent, it's the type of book that both those were. To another extent, I just don't want to drag her into this.
PLAYBOY: So it's protection as much as it is respect?
COATES: Or more respect than protection. I don't know if she needs protection, but respect, yeah.
PLAYBOY: Were you surprised by the discussion about the lack of women in Between the World and Me?
COATES: Not surprised. I wouldn't change that about that book, though. That book is 176 pages. It is what it is. My view on art, though, is a little different from most people's. When Girls first came out, there was this whole thing: "Why is Girls so white?" I want Lena Dunham to make the show she wants to make; I just want other people to have the chance to make shows too. The problem is not that Lena Dunham's world is totally white. That's her world. She's an artist. She's not a policy maker. But there are other worlds too, and other people should have the opportunity to put those worlds on display. It's the same for Between the World and Me, and this takes it back to the whole thing of being the best or the most representative. A book can't carry the entire weight of all the nuance and texture of the black community. It's just one dude who not too long ago was on unemployment. What people need to do is read other folks. This is not the only African American memoir. There's other stuff out there that should be explored.
PLAYBOY: What was unemployment like?
COATES: I was scared. I was scared for my son and, at that time, my girlfriend. I didn't have anything else to offer the world, so this was going to be it. Either it was going to hit or it wasn't, but this was what I was going to do. I had dropped out of school. I had no proof that I was capable of doing much else. I had been laid off from Time magazine. That was the third job I'd lost, and I was like, Maybe I don't have it, but I have to do it; I don't have anything else. So it was incredibly scary.
PLAYBOY: Dealing with your partner then, was it "You can do it!" or more like "So you know you've got to get a job, right?"
COATES: I wanted to drive a taxicab, but she was like, "I think you need to spend more time writing." She'd say that over and over again. It was never "Go get a job." I'm happy she was right. She had faith. "You're going to go out and break the world. You just need to keep doing it." She was right. That's insane. I couldn't see it.
PLAYBOY: Do you ever feel insecure when you're around academics?
COATES: No, I just want to listen more. I wish they would stop asking me what I think. [laughs] No, I don't feel insecure. They tell me I'm wrong and here's why I'm wrong. I've had that before, and that's cool. I look for that. I still feel like a student. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong.
PLAYBOY: In 25 years, how do you think we'll remember the Black Lives Matter movement?
COATES: I think that depends on what happens. I think it has been pretty effective. This whole conversation about body cameras, retraining the New York Police Department, the way Ferguson went down and the report that came out, I think they've been tremendously effective. One of the reasons movements like that get criticized is they say, "Well, what are you about? What specific thing?" But you've seen specifics come out of this.
PLAYBOY: Why do you think this has happened at this time?
COATES: It's totally the technology and the ability to get people assembled relatively quickly. It's not original in the sense that, in large part, the civil rights movement was very much a product of TV cameras and photography. So it's not totally surprising or unprecedented.
PLAYBOY: How do you feel about the way the presidential candidates have dealt with that movement?
COATES: They know it about as well as they can. I had high expectations for Bernie. I thought he would have known certain things. I don't know how you're a candidate on the left in the Democratic Party but not really competing for the black vote. You ain't got to come out for reparations, but you've got to speak to these people who've lived their lives not just as colorless victims of Wall Street, because they're black—not as some sort of accident but because of who they are. You've got to have some sort of facility with that, and I don't think he does. I don't think Bernie's a bad person or doesn't care about black people. I think you need staff around you to say, "Yo, when you go to South Carolina, you've got to do this, you've got to do that." He just didn't have that.
PLAYBOY: What do you think about Hillary Clinton?
COATES: I don't know what's going to happen under Hillary Clinton. Obviously she's preferable to Donald Trump, and I don't blame black folks who vote for her or support her. I get it. But I just don't know. When I see her husband defending her use of the "superpredator," come on. Talking about how the crime bill actually cut crime, come on. Stand back. Defending welfare reform at this hour? Here's the thing that's most damning for me: How do you take $600,000 from Goldman Sachs for speeches, knowing you're going to run for president? Somebody says, "What were you doing?" and you say, "Well, that's what they offered." It's a disturbing lack of personal judgment. So it scares me.
PLAYBOY: Is there anyone whose style you'd like to emulate?
COATES: Toni Morrison, because she doesn't really talk. She does interviews, but she's not, like, out there. People forget how viciously she was attacked in the 1980s, but at the end of the day, the work just stands for itself. Also, she has this kind of regalness.

I'd like to be quieter. I think I'd like to be quieter and let the work speak for itself.

"A brilliant start to one of Marvel's most promising new series." – Vox.com
BLACK PANTHER
NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
TA-NEHISI COATES
ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN STELFREEZE
A NATION UNDER OUR FEET BOOK ONE
MARVEL
LOONEY TUNES
GREATEST HITS
DUCK SEASON
SAMPLE
BOOM!
OUT OF THE NIGHT
TOMB OF TERROR
WITCHES TALES
CHAMBER OF CHILLS
DYNAMITE
JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AME
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY
SUPERMAN
THE THREE MUSKETEERS
A CELEBRATION
OF SKULL ISL

JUST BRITT

A sensual treat!

This month we're proud to feature an extremely talented Texan girl that's got just as much heart as she does beauty. She's sweet, she's sensual, she's totally gorgeous and she's good at practically everything she does. From being an active firefighter and working on cars to art and caring for rescue animals, Britt sits with us to give us the low down on who she is and what's she's all about!

Model **@JUSTBRIT01**

Photography by **KEN MISCHKE**
PR **LSA PUBLICATIONS | @LEO.ALDERMAN @LSAPUBLICATIONS**

Tell us something surprising about you?
Something about me that is surprising is how well rounded I am! I don't just model, but I draw, raise rescue animals, work on cars, remodel my house, and am a firefighter! I am always willing to try new things and I love challenges!

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Oh my gosh! I was super excited when I was told I was shooting for Playboy! This has always been a dream of mine!

What inspires you?
Things that inspire me are just myself really. I enjoy hard work, and not being like anyone else, so that inspires me!

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modeling?
Honestly, growing up I was made fun of and referred to as ugly, so I guess just finally filling into myself pushed me to model.

Who do you look up to in the modeling industry?
In the modeling industry, there are so many amazingly talented ladies – I simply can't pick one!

What are some of your hobbies?
My hobbies range from drawing and raising baby squirrels to repairing and remodeling my home! Oh, and working out!

Name three things on your bucket list?
My main goal is to tour Europe! Aside from that I am trying to get another horse, and I want to have my own farm!

Turn-ons...
Sweet people, hard-working, and honest.

Turnoffs...
One major is just rudeness!

Describe to us your perfect date...
A perfect date for me is pretty simple, a nice dinner and a movie is perfect! Of course, lots of cuddles as well!

Describe yourself in three words...
Driven, dedicated, delightful!

What is your mantra?
My mantra literally is YOLO "You only live once!"

Follow Britt's journey on Instagram @justbrit01 for all her latest news and story updates!

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Playboy Interview

KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

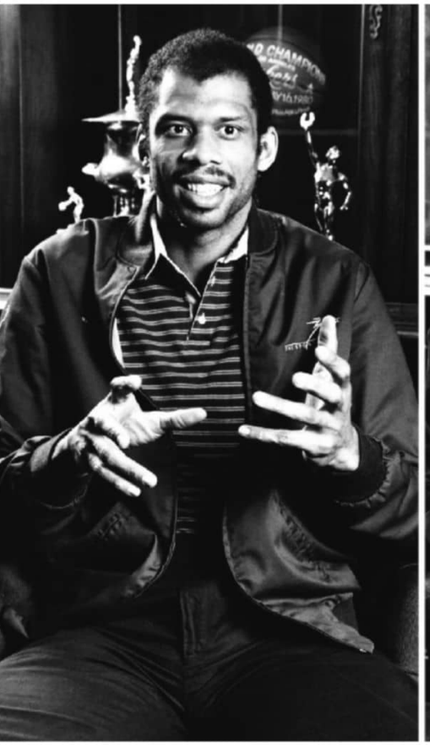
A candid conversation with one of the greatest basketball players of all time

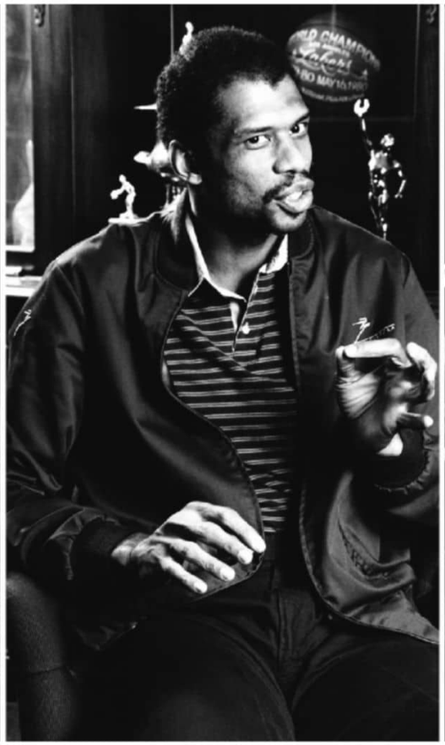
INTERVIEW BY **LARRY LINDERMAN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RON MESAROS**

At the advanced age of 39, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar—a dinosaur by professional basketball standards—continues to act less like a lion in winter than like a stallion in spring. The National Basketball Association's only active player to have graduated from college before the start of the Seventies, Abdul-Jabbar, a graceful, 7'2" scoring machine, has virtually rewritten the league's record books. Now nearing the end of his 17th pro season (the only N.B.A. player ever to reach that milestone), Abdul-Jabbar adds to his fistful of career records each time he sets foot on court.

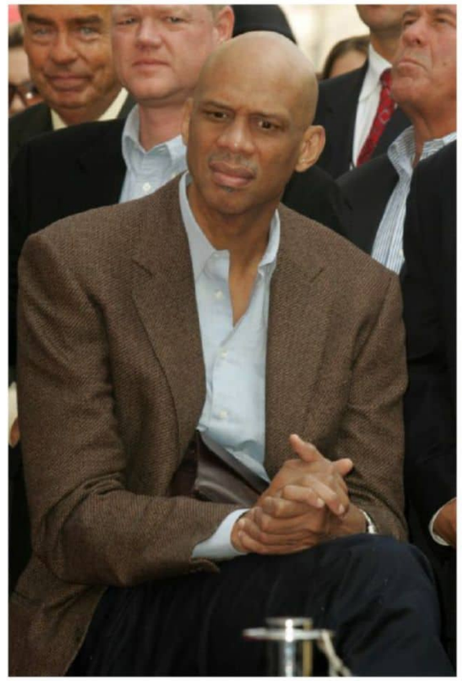
Before the start of the season, he had already become the N.B.A.'s all-time leader in scoring, in most field goals attempted and made and in most blocked shots. By the end of the current campaign, his one-man assault on N.B.A. stats will also include most minutes and most games ever played by a pro. Forget such items as his appearance in 15 straight All-Star games and his place as the N.B.A.'s all-time scoring leader in postseason play.

Oddly enough, Abdul-Jabbar cares very little about all of the above. He just wants to win, period. As the captain and heart and soul of the Los Angeles Lakers, he led his team last season to its third league championship in the past six years. He's intent on a repeat performance this season and, with Los Angeles having easily won the Pacific Division title, it seems likely that the N.B.A. championship series will again pit the Lakers against their archrivals, the Boston Celtics. Says Milwaukee Bucks coach Don Nelson, p"The Celtics and the Lakers are head and shoulders above the rest of us, and we just have to face it."





Nelson and most other N.B.A. coaches have also wondered aloud how Abdul-Jabbar can continue performing without showing any signs of wear and tear. If anything, he has actually improved in recent years. Last season, he averaged 22 points per game—his highest figure since the 1981–1982 season—and his .599 field-goal average was the second highest of his career. Singer Neil Young used to complain that rust never sleeps; he obviously had never met anyone with Abdul-Jabbar's natural undercoating. Time simply refuses to dim his shooting eye. His sky hook, which Playboy once described as p"the most beautiful basketball shot ever invented," remains as eerily accurate and unstoppable as ever.



Despite his athletic brilliance, however, Abdul-Jabbar has long been one of sport's most enigmatic—and least popular—superstars. For most of his career, he has had a distant relationship with the press and public alike. Much of that can be traced to his troubled adolescence. Born on April 16, 1947, in New York City, Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor was a studious, shy youngster raised by middle-class parents. Unfortunately, he grew up at a time when blacks were still subject to segregation, Jim Crow laws and lynchings, and all that left its mark. His parents wanted their son to get a good Catholic education and sent him to Power Memorial High School in Manhattan. Alcindor excelled at academics and basketball and was close to Jack Donohue, the school's basketball coach. But then, during half time of a sloppy game against a weak opponent, Donohue tried to fire him up by telling him, p"You're acting just like a nigger!" Not a bright move. Alcindor went into a shell at that point.

While a student at UCLA, Alcindor renounced Catholicism and became a Moslem. In 1971, he publicly announced that he had changed his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Arabic for p"noble and powerful servant" of Allah. Abdul-Jabbar then avoided the press the way Moslems avoid alcohol and barbecued ribs. It wasn't until after he split up with his personal spiritual advisor that he began opening up to people, a process that accelerated after his house burned down in January 1983. Abdul-Jabbar's fans knew that their man had lost thousands of jazz records in the blaze; when fans from cities around the league began sending him records, Abdul-Jabbar—almost like Sally Field at last year's Academy Awards—suddenly realized, "They like me." Since then, his view of America and the world has become much more sanguine.

To interview the man most experts consider the greatest player in the history of basketball, Playboy sent free-lancer Lawrence Linderman to meet with Abdul-Jabbar in Los Angeles. Linderman reports:

"Even though I'd suggested we interview Abdul-Jabbar, I regarded the assignment with more apprehension than I'd felt before any of my 22 previous p'Playboy Interviews.' Some years ago, I had interviewed him for a short Playboy feature and had come away thinking I'd never met a man so filled with gloom and icy anger. To my great surprise and relief, he no longer had a psychic chip on his shoulder. To his great surprise and relief, he had ended his isolated, alienated existence. In some ways, he's almost like a monk who, having observed a lifelong, self-imposed vow of silence, one day discovers how joyous it can be to get in touch with the world—and with himself as well.

"When we met, Abdul-Jabbar was in the process of moving into a huge stone mansion built on the Bel Air site where his ranch house had burned down three years before. During the couple of weeks we devoted to the interview, workmen were still putting the finishing touches on the outside of the house. Inside, the cavernous place was mostly bare: Although Abdul-Jabbar had bought furniture six months before moving in, a shipping company had misplaced his things; and when I saw him about a month later in New York, his furniture was still somewhere in transit.

"In any case, he had a table and chairs in his kitchen, and that's where we began our conversations. A few months before, he had announced his intention to bow out of basketball after the 1986-1987 season; that provided the opening subject for our interview."

PLAYBOY: Not long after you said that the current season would be your last, the Los Angeles Lakers announced that you'd agreed to play one more year. Do you really intend to play next season, or was that announcement a smoke screen enabling you to duck a yearlong series of g"Farewell, Kareem" nights?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Oh, no; barring injury, I'll probably play one

more year; but I won't make that decision until the end of the playoffs. If I don't think I can play up to my expectations, then I'll quit. In all probability, though, I'll be out there again next fall.

PLAYBOY: You've come close to retiring during each of the past three years. Why haven't you? Does the game mean more to you than perhaps you suspected?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Well, first of all, it's a great way to make a living; and even though I've probably had enough adrenaline rushes to last three lifetimes, I still enjoy the competition. I've also enjoyed proving certain people wrong. After the '83 season, the Lakers didn't sign me and I became a free agent—and no one offered me a contract for months. I was out there all alone, and a lot of people just wrote me off. They felt that at 36, I was on my way out; but eventually the Lakers and I got together and, lo and behold, here I am, still hanging around. We won the N.B.A. championship last year, and I had a very successful season, which dispelled all that talk.

PLAYBOY: You'll be 40 before the end of next season. What inroads have the years made on your ability?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I really haven't seen any. In fact, because of my conditioning program, I think I'm probably realizing more of my physical potential than I did ten years ago. I always knew that I had to pay close attention to my cardiovascular condition, strength training and stretching, but I don't think I finally got all three of them straight until a few years ago, and that's what's kept me in the game. Believe me, if you don't have it physically, it doesn't matter whether you want to play or not—it just doesn't happen.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying you don't have to pace yourself differently during games?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I don't, no. I've found that it's better to play as well as I can for as long as I can. After that, the coach can take me out; but I think that if you check, you'll find that I've been playing more minutes than any other player on the team. I'm calling it quits after next season only because I want to spend time with my children, but I really think I could play a few more years at the same level.

PLAYBOY: You're no doubt aware that most sports fans have long considered you enigmatic, if not downright sullen and hostile. How did that come about?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Basically, it was my own fault, because I never tried to communicate with sportswriters; and as a result of all the negative interaction between me and the press, I got a bad image. I was described as distant, cold, etc.—but it didn't matter to me. I knew that if I talked to these guys and decided to court the press systematically, I'd get certain benefits, but I just didn't care. I always had my guard up, and I was unapproachable. I think I felt that way until a couple of years ago, when I finally got tired of being bum-rapped in the press. I found that when I worked just a little bit at trying to communicate and smooth things over, I got a great result: People seemed to feel a lot differently about me. Their image of me and their support of me have taken on a different tone. It's much more like, "He's one of us." I had to work for that, and I had to learn about that, and I'm glad I finally absorbed those lessons and made them useful in my life. Being liked and having people come up to me and feeling comfortable about it have made the adjustment worth the effort.

PLAYBOY: Why had you decided not to talk to the press in the first place?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Probably because when I was in high school and then at UCLA, sportswriters assumed that the teams I was on would win championships. That idea of foregone success took the thrill out of playing. Because of all the attention and all the great expectations, there was just no sense of discovery, no surprises. They'd already put me at the top; they had said that's where I belonged, and by doing so, they took away the fun of it. Any success I had was going to be taken for granted, and a knew it. And I was right.

PLAYBOY: You mean you got pissed off just because sportswriters correctly assessed your ability?

ABDUL-JABBAR: It didn't piss me off, but it was a downer. In my senior year of high school, there were 60 other players at least seven feet tall who were going on to college, yet it seemed to be a foregone conclusion that I'd lead whatever school I went to to the N.C.A.A. championship. That put pressure on me; but fortunately, my coach at UCLA was John Wooden, and his whole thing was, "We'll ignore all that talk and just play basketball."

PLAYBOY: UCLA did, indeed, win national championships during the three years you played there. When you graduated, a lot of sportswriters called you the greatest college ballplayer of all time, and nowadays they're calling you the greatest pro of all time. How do you react to such praise?

ABDUL-JABBAR: It's very flattering and it's nice to be considered in that light, but I don't get too excited about it. I know that I've been very successful and that it's hard to measure success.

PLAYBOY: Modesty aside, have you ever suspected that you might be the best player in the game?

ABDUL-JABBAR: At times, yes, but basketball is a funny game: There are certain things forwards have to do, other things that guards have to do, and centers have something else that they have to do. It's hard for me to measure myself against players like Julius Erving, Dave DeBusschere, Chet Walker, Elgin Baylor, John Havlicek and all of the other great forwards I've competed against. Same thing with guards: I just can't find any basis for comparing myself with players like Oscar Robertson and Magic Johnson.

PLAYBOY: You, Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell are overwhelmingly regarded as the three greatest centers of all time. How do you compare yourself with them?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Hard to say, because the game has changed since they left it. Today, N.B.A. teams have to shoot within 24 seconds, and the three-second lane is 16 feet wide. Wilt played a long time with a 12-foot-wide lane, which meant he could get closer to the basket before taking his shots, so it's hard to compare what he did with what I've done. Still, how many players are going to average more than 50 points a game, as he did one season? Bill Russell never had overwhelming individual stats, but he was the key ingredient in the greatest dynasty in the game. Yet I can't compare myself with him, either, because basketball is a team game, not an individual game. When I was in the seventh grade, I started going to Madison Square Garden regularly, and I learned how to win by watching Russell play. Bill played for his teammates. He passed the ball a lot, he rebounded and started the fast break and was always there plugging up the middle on defense—he was content to do that. Russell showed me that if you play for the other guys on the team, you get a lot more out of everybody.

PLAYBOY: What did Chamberlain show you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Chamberlain played the game the same way Russell did, except he scored so much more. But his teams had to get more points from him. He'd score 45 points and his teams would still lose.

PLAYBOY: One year, Chamberlain led the N.B.A. in assists. Do you think it might have been a reaction—

ABDUL-JABBAR: To everybody's saying that he shot too much? Yes, absolutely. Wilt had to fight people's dissatisfaction that his teams didn't win. There he was, this great dominating player, and his teams didn't win championships. Well, Wilt wasn't playing for the right team. As an individual, he was in a class by himself, but his teammates—they were OK, but not the supporting cast Russell had.

PLAYBOY: Do you think Chamberlain is still frustrated by the way people perceive him and his place in basketball history?

ABDUL-JABBAR: If you want to get Wilt ticked off or bitter, just mention Bill Russell. You will incite him.

PLAYBOY: In 1984, you supplanted Chamberlain as the leading scorer in pro basketball history, mostly on the strength of your hook shot, which your coach, Pat Riley, calls "the ultimate offensive weapon." Most followers of the sport—and players, as well—think your patented sky hook is the most difficult shot in basketball. Do you agree?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Not really, no. I think if you start shooting the hook early enough—and I had the form and release down pat when I was a freshman in high school—it becomes no more difficult than any other shot. And it has one built-in advantage: Because you release the hook from high up and behind your body, nobody can get a hand on it.

PLAYBOY: No one has ever blocked your hook shot?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I think maybe once or twice somebody I hadn't seen came in from behind me and blocked it, but players who've guarded me, no, they couldn't get to it. Nate Thurmond, who played for the Golden State Warriors, was the best in the league as far as playing me one on one went, but even he never blocked the shot. These days, nobody gets to play me one on one anymore. The last time that happened was against Houston; they let Akeem Olajuwon play me one on one for a quarter, and that was it.

PLAYBOY: How do teams defend against you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Oh, every time I get the ball, at least two and sometimes three guys converge on me. That happens every night, because I'm a target, somebody who has to be taken care of.

PLAYBOY: How do opponents try to take care of you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Guys do anything they can get away with, such as using their shoulders and forearms—normal play includes just about everything short of throwing blows. Rick Mahorn, now with the Detroit Pistons, has a lot of lower-body strength, and he's one of the players who'll put a knee up under my behind and actually lift my feet off the floor.

PLAYBOY: But they still don't shut you down. If you hadn't been so consistent with your hook, do you think you'd have been able to do more with other shots?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I would have had to, but I never really considered it, because my hook shot is very accurate. And when I sink it, it makes opposing centers mad. They really get angry. It's not like I'm somebody who's doing a physical number on them. I'm more like somebody with a foil who's sticking them every time.

PLAYBOY: How mad have opponents gotten?

ABDUL-JABBAR: To the point of being funny. Mahorn and I really got into it one night. I'd scored a lot of points, but toward the end of the game—a game that the Lakers had no chance of winning—Rick turned to me and said, g"No, you can't shoot the hook anymore." Next time the Lakers came down the court, Rick positioned himself way up on my left side—the side I go to when I shoot the hook—so I immediately turned the other way and made a lay-up. Mahorn shouted, "Yeah, that's right, Kareem, but forget the hook—that's out!"

PLAYBOY: Which players are difficult for you to guard?

ABDUL-JABBAR: My defense in the pivot is pretty effective. The toughest guy for me throughout my career was Dan Issel, who's retired now. Dan could hit 20-foot jump shots all night long, so I'd have to get out there with him, which left the middle open for his teammates.

PLAYBOY: You're the N.B.A.'s all-time leader in scoring and blocked shots; but in any given year, you're rarely among the league's top ten rebounders. Why not?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Well, I led the N.B.A. in rebounds the first year I played for the Lakers, which was also a year when the team did horribly. Our whole concept now is team rebounding, which is why I don't rebound numerically the way I used to. The idea is that if I get 20 rebounds and the rest of the team gets three, we're going to lose, so everybody on the team has to rebound. My biggest responsibility is to prevent the guy I'm guarding from getting an offensive rebound, because second shots are like nails in your

> There's a lot of pragmatism and flexibility in Islam, but most of the world doesn't know that, because the people who make headlines and support the Islamic cause are coming from a very radical political position.

> Our democracy has never been perfect, and it was hard for Americans to admit that in respect to blacks. Maybe that was understandable, given the fact that blacks weren't brought here to become presidents of corporations.

coffin. When my man can't get near the basket, Magic or Maurice Lucas or Kurt Rambis will be there to get the rebound.

PLAYBOY: Who are the league's toughest rebounders?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Oh, Akeem Olajuwon is very good because of his agility. Jeff Ruland and Jack Sikma are great rebounders, too. But if you asked us who's number one in that department, I think we'd all say Moses Malone. He never stops coming at you and he's strong as a bull.

PLAYBOY: In his Playboy Interview [March 1984], Malone told us he sometimes feels he should wear boxing gloves on the court. Is that what it's like for all N.B.A. centers?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No, that's just the way Moses plays. He's very physical and very smart. In 1983, the 76ers blew us out of the finals in four straight games, and Moses was just relentless. I had to appraise what I was doing wrong insofar as the way I played him, so I went to Pete Newell, who has a summer camp for teaching pros the fundamentals of whatever it is they're not doing right. Newell's the professor—about 25 years ago, when he coached the University of California, his team won the N.C.A.A. championship. Anyway, I took Pete some video tape of our '83 Play-off games against the 76ers and asked him to critique my performance against Moses.

PLAYBOY: What were you doing wrong?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Specifically, I was holding my hands at my sides and, just before a rebound, Moses would lean against me and pin one of my arms to my side. He'd knock me off balance for a split second, which was enough to let him get the rebound. Moses makes his living doing things like that. Newell showed me that I had to keep my hands and arms up higher and use my butt to knock people's weight off me so that I didn't get thrown off balance. The next two years—'84 and '85—my rebound average went up.

PLAYBOY: Basketball is supposedly a noncontact sport, yet it's become very physical in the past decade. Why?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Well, the closer you are to the basket, the more physical the game gets. Coaches generally want players to take shots from as close to the basket as possible, because the closer you are, the higher your shooting percentage. What happens is that everybody tries to get as close to the basket as he can. On offense, I'm not allowed anywhere near the basket. That's the book on me: Play me as physically as possible, to the point where you take a few fouls and see what the refs will let you get away with. I'll tell you, by the end of the season, I feel like a piece of chopped meat. The area under the hoop is serious, serious territory, and because centers play closest to the basket, they have the most serious job. There's very little levity under the basket. That's where most people end up bleeding.

PLAYBOY: Don't you think you're confirming what Malone had to say about wearing boxing gloves during games?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Oh, I'm definitely not into fisticuffs.

PLAYBOY: Then why have you been involved in fights on court?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I think you're probably referring to the Kent Benson episode, and if what led up to it happened again, I probably wouldn't react the same way. In 1977, in a game against Milwaukee, I was just standing in the lane, waiting for the ball to come down court, when Benson, who was then a rookie, looked at me, looked up court and then just fired an elbow into my solar plexus. That was one thing I wasn't going to tolerate.

PLAYBOY: You'd never caught an elbow?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I'd never gotten one that was so blatant and that also knocked the wind out of me. I mean, when he hit me, I went down—and when I jumped up, about seven seconds later, I was outraged. I threw one right hand at him, and I've never decked anyone so badly. When the league finished its investigation, I got fined, and I'll never get over that, because it was as if I were the villain. The film clearly shows that wasn't the case.

PLAYBOY: You once said that before games, you work up a sense of antagonism toward the center who'll be guarding you. Is it really as grim as all that?

ABDUL-JABBAR: If I said antagonism, I didn't really mean it in a personal way against other players. And even though the level of competition is very high, I've gotten friendly with guys like Mahorn and Issel. Dan's a funny man, and he'd always have something ironic to say about what was happening. I've got to appreciate him as a person. His little daughter didn't know anything about basketball, but after she saw me in Airplane! and found out I played against her father, she asked Dan to get my autograph; so in his house, I'm a movie star. Bob Lanier, who played for Detroit, was also very funny. Bob wanted the refs to call every play his way, and he also wanted every rebound and didn't want you to run down the court too fast.

PLAYBOY: Would he actually tell you that?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Oh, he'd get mad at me for running down the court too fast. And then he'd yell at his coach, too: "Hey, I'm in here trying to rebound—what do you expect, man, everything?" I knew that Bob used to smoke cigarettes at half time, so I'd make him run a lot, and by the fourth quarter, he'd always be out of it. During games, we got to the point of blows' being thrown; but away from the court, Bob and I always got along. Lanier said he loved the Bruce Lee movie I was in, Game of Death, because I got killed.

PLAYBOY: How did you happen to be in that movie?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Bruce and I were buddies. I'd studied aikido in New York one summer while I was a student at UCLA, and when I returned to Los Angeles in the fall, the editor of Black Belt magazine introduced me to Bruce, and we began working out together.

PLAYBOY: How much progress did you make in martial arts?

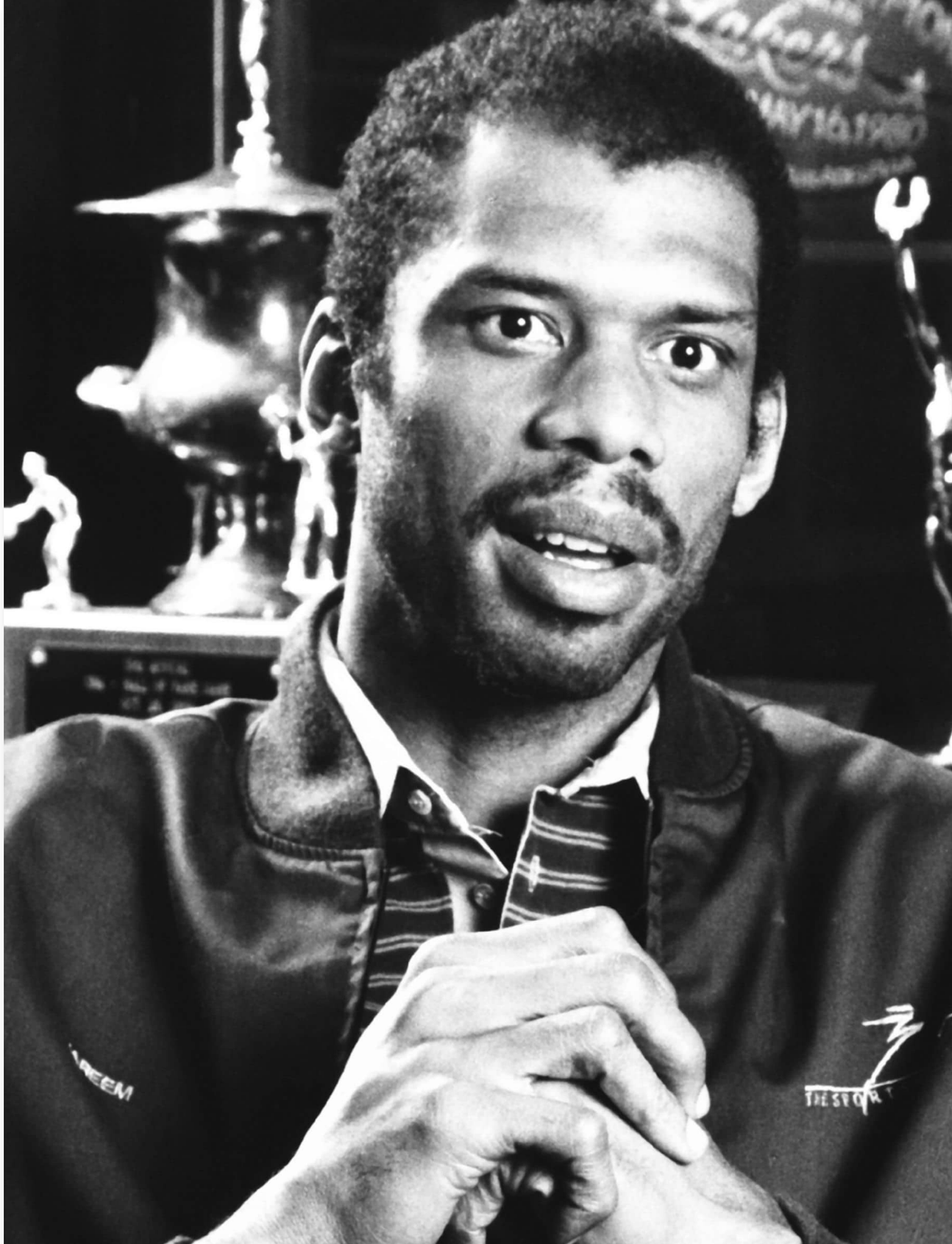
ABDUL-JABBAR: I did pretty well. Bruce wanted somebody to train with who could give him some problems, and he liked sparring with me because of my height and reach—that gave me enough of an advantage to make him work a little bit. Bruce graduated me a couple of times in his own discipline, which was called jeet kune do. Basically, it was boxing and kicking, plus a few blocking techniques.

PLAYBOY: Was his death a shock to you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: It was a terrible shock. I was on my way to see Bruce when he died—a blood vessel burst in his brain. I'd been traveling around the world and was coming home from Pakistan, and I decided to stop and see Bruce in Hong Kong. So I sent him a telegram and told him I was coming in, and three days later, when I got to the airport at Singapore to fly to Hong Kong, his death was reported in all the newspapers there.

PLAYBOY: Did you continue studying martial arts after Lee died?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No, but it wasn't because of Bruce's death, which I took as a personal loss. I'd mastered what he had taught me and wasn't that keen about going any further with it. Once you mature to the point where the prospect of combat doesn't obsess you, it changes you a lot. You don't worry g"Can I kick this person's ass?" and you understand that you don't always have to be involved in life-and-death confrontations. The only thing I do now



is a form of yoga taught in Los Angeles by Bikram Choudhury, who won the world championship in weight lifting. Bikram's yoga class is designed to enhance muscle elasticity.

PLAYBOY: Let's shift gears. For the past several years, newspapers have reported widespread drug use in the N.B.A. Are such stories accurate?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I can only speak of what I've seen, which is that guys who do a lot of drugs don't last too long in the N.B.A. The physical demands made on a basketball player are so extensive that anything that detracts from your conditioning tells on you real soon. If we're talking about players who keep their heads above water and who fool around a little at an occasional party, yes, I think we've seen only the tip of the iceberg. But if we're talking about guys who get heavily into drugs, they end up having serious problems and are out of the league very quickly.

PLAYBOY: Would you level with us about your own drug use?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Well, I went to school in the Sixties and used grass when I went to movies and concerts—the usual profile. I tried LSD a couple of times in college, and that was definitely enough.

PLAYBOY: Did you have bad trips on LSD?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No, I never freaked out. I got a lot of laughter out of it—the absurdities of life are not that pronounced until you take a strong psychedelic. But your perception becomes obscured, and I didn't like that, because I wasn't in control. When I realized how easily you could lose your grip on reality, I said, g"Whoa! I've had it with this stuff."

PLAYBOY: You've admitted that you once tried snorting heroin. What were the circumstances?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I just wanted to try it—that's how bright I was. After my junior year at UCLA, I was back in New York for the summer, and I went up with some friends to Saint Nicholas Park in Harlem, which was a safe place for junkies to hang out. I had two or three snorts right around 11 o'clock at night, and after that, when the guys passed the stuff over to me, I pretended to snort more, but I'd had enough. More than enough: For two or three hours, I couldn't focus both of my eyes at the same time.

PLAYBOY: Why did you want to try heroin? Was it a macho thing to do?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Yeah, I really wanted to show that I was one of the guys. Along with the other junkies, I sat in that park until four in the morning. I got home at seven and I had to go to work at 7:45.

PLAYBOY: What kind of job did you have?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I was working for the city—my job was to talk to kids about not screwing up their lives. Nice, huh? My friend Julian Dancy, a guy I grew up with and went to high school with, picked me up in his car and immediately knew what I'd been doing. I suppose it was hard for him to miss it: During the drive over to where I was speaking, all of a sudden I said, g"I have to throw up now," and I rolled down my window quick. I'll never forget the look on Julian's face: It was a combination of disgust, anger and disappointment. I knew I never wanted to see that look directed at me again.

PLAYBOY: Did a lot of your friends have problems with drugs?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Yeah, and some of them are dead as a result. One guy I grew up with dealt cocaine and died of malnutrition—and when they found him, he had almost $5000 in his pocket. He was eating two or three hot dogs a day, but his main consumption was cocaine.

PLAYBOY: What about your own consumption of cocaine?

ABDUL-JABBAR: That started and really ended right before my rookie year in the N.B.A. A guy I'd known since we'd both been kids was dealing cocaine, and he had some great stuff. He said, g"Hey, Kareem, let's do some hangin' out," and I said, "Right!" So I hung out with him for the better part of a day, and I did too much. I got real wired and, later on, I went for a drive. I wanted to get on whatever expressway it was, and you know how some on ramps begin as two lanes and then merge into one? Well, another driver and I got to the of ramp at the same time, and I just decided I was going to get to the expressway first. I mean, he was not gonna beat me! So I floored it, which was not a bright move: It had been raining and the highway was slippery. My car went into a skid, jumped the curb and then did one and a half turns on wet grass. I remember thinking, I could be wrapped around a tree trunk! Why did I do this? I definitely knew that the stuff had altered my personality. At that point, I realized it was best to leave cocaine to people who really wanted to do it. There were occasions after that when I fooled around with it, but I didn't get pulled in.

> The history books I read throughout grade school and high school contained absolutely nothing about what black people did for this country… black people only get credit for urban crime and welfare fraud, with a little rhythm-and-blues thrown in.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever free-base cocaine?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No, although when that started, some people tried to get me hooked on it. That wasn't something I wanted to try even once.

PLAYBOY: The majority of N.B.A. team owners and officials would like to have players tested for drug use. What's your position on that?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I understand their sentiments—they want to do something to protect the sport and the business. There's been a public loss of confidence in the N.B.A. because drug use is so pervasive. The real problem is that they're just seeing what everyone else is seeing: Cocaine has hit the whole of American society. The military, the sports and entertainment industries, the legal and medical professions—anywhere you look, the more affluent parts of society are riddled with drug use. But because basketball players have had a lot of esteem, it's more disappointing to people. I think the N.B.A. is simply trying to do what it can to salvage the respect the public has had for its athletes.

PLAYBOY: Would you object to mandatory drug testing of N.B.A. players?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Yes, I would. Aside from the constitutional ramifications, I think it's moving into an area where athletes would be treated like children. Basketball is not the defense industry or something that's absolutely necessary to our society. I'm not totally against mandatory testing, but I think the N.B.A. should find a less heavy-handed way to satisfy its need to monitor players.

PLAYBOY: If you were put in charge of the problem, how would you try to eliminate drug use in the sport?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Jesus, that's tough to answer. I really think a good education program is always the way to go. Most people do not want to kill themselves or harm themselves. And if you can explain that to them in terms they can understand, usually they'll make the switch.

PLAYBOY: Having had your own fling with it, what can you tell people who want to try cocaine or are having their first experiences with it?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I can tell them that cocaine is very attractive. And that it's insidious. You think you're having a nice time, and in reality, you're on the way to the gallows. As in most cases with things like this, you don't see it until it's too late. You don't realize you have a cocaine problem until the blood vessels in your nose burst, or your teeth fall out, or you're dying of malnutrition, or you've lost your job and your family. That's when you find out you have a problem. Ishmael Reed wrote the most ironic—not funny, just ironic—thing I've read on this subject. Reed says cocaine is the Incas' revenge on the Europeans.

PLAYBOY: The subject of religion has come into the conversation tangentially; do you mind talking about what caused you to become a Moslem?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I don't mind at all. That came about after a long search. I always went to Catholic schools, because they were the best schools in New York at the time and my mother wanted me to get the best education possible. I hadn't truly been indoctrinated into the religion until I went to school, and when I learned about Jesus Christ at Power Memorial, well, it was a wonderful and illuminating encounter. But what they ended up teaching had nothing to do with the life of Jesus.

PLAYBOY: What did you think you were being taught instead?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I couldn't verbalize it at the time, but in hindsight, it was more like thought crime, and I put up with it because everybody else did. After all, this was our connection with the eternal and all that, and there were certain things you weren't supposed to think about.

PLAYBOY: Such as?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Sex. But then puberty showed up, and that was it: From that point on, I knew that Catholicism wasn't for me. We were being told that it was a sin to think about sex, and meanwhile, you'd have these hormones racing through your body at five times the speed of light.

PLAYBOY: How did you deal with those attacks of wild male hormones?

ABDUL-JABBAR: At first, I tried telling myself, "Don't even think about sex," but that was impossible; it's called adolescence. And, of course, I didn't know that all my friends who were supposedly getting all these women were lying to me. There I was, envying my friends and at the same time thinking, If it happens, it means I'll have to go to hell.

PLAYBOY: Were you ready to sacrifice your soul?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Oh, yes, but only for Sophia Loren. She never seemed to be around, though, and I didn't lose my virginity until I was 17.

PLAYBOY: Did you feel as if you had come late to the party?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No, because everybody else was dying, too. There were certain girls we'd see and we'd all go, "Ohhhh!" I had plenty of company in those days. When it finally happened, I knew it had to get better. And it did, too—as they say in Paris, "Eventuellement."

PLAYBOY: What went wrong the first time?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Nothing, except for the effect it had on my nervous system: I had the shakes for about five minutes afterward. It was probably more like 30 seconds, but it sure felt like five minutes. You know, I really did have a religious conflict about premarital sex, and it wasn't until later that I found out it was a charade everybody played, but I took it seriously. I was one of those kids. [Laughs] I suffered for my idealism.

PLAYBOY: Would it be fair to suggest that you were more naive than most of your classmates?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Oh, yeah. But at the same time, I was truly curious as to whether or not there really was a Supreme Being and what, if anything, made human beings unique. I wanted to get some rational, in-depth knowledge about the subject, so in my senior year in high school, I started reading just about everything I could get my hands on—Hindu texts, Upanishads, Zen, Hermann Hesse—you name it.

PLAYBOY: What most impressed you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Hesse's Siddhartha. I was then going through the same things that Siddhartha went through in his adolescence, and I identified with his rebellion against established precepts of love and life. Siddhartha becomes an aesthetic man, a wealthy man, a sensuous man—he explores all these different worlds and doesn't find enlightenment in any of them. That was the book's great message to me, so I started to try to develop my own value system as to what was good and what wasn't. And then, in my freshman year at UCLA, I read The Autobiography of Malcolm X, and that made more of an impression on me than any book I'd ever read.

PLAYBOY: And that attracted you to the Islamic religion?

ABDUL-JABBAR: It was a combination of Malcolm and my Catholic upbringing, because Moslems are very affirmative about the Old Testament. It's the same basic tradition; the dispute comes as to who was going to be the final prophet that Jews, Christians and Moslems all believed was coming. Basically, Jews, Christians and Moslems all believe in the God of Abraham. That's a common thread.

PLAYBOY: Then how do you explain the deep divisions among the three religions?

ABDUL-JABBAR: That's the baffling thing about it: None of the people who hold up these causes are acting the way Mohammed or Jesus or Moses or David taught people and showed people how to act, with the examples being their own lives. It's a strange thing to observe.

PLAYBOY: Did you consider becoming a Black Muslim?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No, but after my sophomore year at UCLA, I went up to a Black Muslim rally in Harlem, because Muhammad Ali was the speaker, and I'd always admired him. I was a college all-American by then, and when the rally was over, I was invited to have dinner with Ali at Louis Farrakhan's house in Queens. We didn't really discuss religion that night, but when I started reading

about them, the Black Muslims didn't appeal to my sense of what was really true.

PLAYBOY: With what did you find fault?

ABDUL-JABBAR: The Black Muslims were xenophobic. It also seemed to me that the people at the top of the pyramid were doing great, but the people at the bottom were out selling newspapers in the freezing cold. I knew some of those guys, and they had to buy whatever they didn't sell. I didn't see any need for that. But what the Black Muslims talked about as far as black people's helping one another improve our conditions in America went made sense. That was the one thing about the Black Muslims that appealed to me, because Christian churches, for all their strength and ability to organize in the black community, have never seemed to mount anything economic or political that can protect and advance black people's interests.

PLAYBOY: What do you think of Farrakhan's views today?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I think he's misleading. I don't feel it's possible for blacks to have a separate society within America. Black society has existed in America as a different kind of mini society, but what the Black Muslims are talking about—a kind of independent nation-state—well, I just don't think it can be achieved. I would be overwhelmed with joy if black people could achieve economic and political independence and strength, and I think those are realistic goals. But they won't ever be achieved through Farrakhan's insular, separatist, hostile attitude. I believe that's going to create a polarization that'll take black people back several steps before they can walk past that point again.

PLAYBOY: Many people see Farrakhan as an anti-Semitic demagog, whipping up racial hatred. Do you agree with anything he stands for?

ABDUL-JABBAR: There are certain things I definitely agree with him on. Black people do need to be economically and politically more sophisticated and capable. That's absolutely correct, but the stuff Farrakhan tacks onto that; well, I just can't deal with it. The whole thing about white people as devils—was John Brown the Devil? A lot more like him would have really helped black people in America. I just don't agree with the Black Muslims' racist delineation of who's good and who's evil.

PLAYBOY: What induced you to become a convert to the Islamic faith?

ABDUL-JABBAR: When I started learning about it, I read the Koran and different things Moslem mystics had written, and there was this body of knowledge that perhaps wasn't black, but it wasn't European, either. I think a lot of black people are attracted to Islam in this country because the religion espouses egalitarianism, and the morality is basically the same that you find in Christianity. But the religion itself is a little more realistic. There's no hierarchy of priests that can rip you off.

PLAYBOY: That's pretty strong; why do you feel so hostile toward Catholicism?

ABDUL-JABBAR: When I was a freshman at UCLA, I did a lot of research and learned that Arab Moslems had enslaved black people in East Africa and that Christians had enslaved black people in West Africa, so no one can point a finger. But I also came across a papal bull, written in the 15th or 16th century, that basically said, "It's all right to enslave blacks and make them Christians. Let the slave trade roll." And the Catholic Church received a percentage of the profits. That was really it for me and Catholicism.

PLAYBOY: How did you feel about white people at that point?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I went through a period of angry racism and was affected by it for a little while, but then I realized that it was making me ill. My parents had always subscribed to Jet magazine, and well before I had had any personal experiences with whites, I had read about black people's being lynched. I remember when the black church in Birmingham was bombed, and that really got to me for months. When I was 15, my parents sent me down to North Carolina by bus to attend the high school graduation of a family friend's daughter. It was 1962, and I saw Jim Crow signs [whites only] all the way through Virginia and North Carolina. Black people couldn't drink at the same water fountains, use the same rest rooms or eat at the same restaurants as whites. It was hard to understand it, and the more of it I saw, the less trust I had for white people other than the ones I'd known.

PLAYBOY: The exceptions?

ABDUL-JABBAR: [*Laughs*] Right, the exceptions. I'm very thankful for those exceptions, because when I started to think logically about the subject of race again, I realized there had always been exceptions in my life, so I had to throw that theory out. I got some help with that.

PLAYBOY: From whom?

ABDUL-JABBAR: A man named Hamaas Abdul-Khaalis. My father had known him in the late Forties and early Fifties, when they were both very active as musicians. He told me that if I wanted to know more about the Moslem religion, I should talk with Hamaas, so I went to see him. Hamaas was then working for a Harlem agency that helped high school dropouts get their equivalency diplomas. He showed me that being antiwhite or anti-Semitic was ridiculous and an infection—that's the best word I can use for it. He was a sincere, down-to-earth guy, and he understood how to live as a Moslem in America and still function as an American.

PLAYBOY: Is that difficult to do?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No. The Prophet Mohammed said that the faith can't be a burden on you, so if you have to work and can't make all your prayers, that's not a big deal. There's a lot of pragmatism and flexibility in Islam, but most of the world doesn't know that, because the people who make headlines and support the Islamic cause are coming from a very radical political position.

PLAYBOY: Are you referring to Lebanon and Khomeini's Iran?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Yes, and that situation really saddens me, because there's a lot of senseless slaughter going on there, and I share so much with a lot of those peoples. There's nationalism of all types, political fervor of varying degrees, and none of it is really based in logic.

PLAYBOY: What do you think should be done about the Palestinian problem?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I don't see any solution to it at all. There's just going to be more senseless death and destruction among people who really shouldn't be at odds. The most eloquent explanation of what's going on over there was given to me by a Hasidic Jew from Brooklyn. He quoted David Ben-Gurion as to how the Israeli state should evolve and said that what the Israelis are now doing is a little crazy.

PLAYBOY: In what way?

ABDUL-JABBAR: In essence, he said that Jews had had to forcefully make a place for themselves, but now, having done that, they've become too caught up in the theory that might is right. To keep a people under your heel just because it feels good or it's convenient or whatever—well, it's eventually going to work against Israel. I can see, 30 or 40 years from now, the same type of incidents that led to the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto happening someplace in the West Bank. And for what? Those people—the Palestinians—are human. They will react to suppression the same way any people do, the same way Jews finally did.

PLAYBOY: Yet organizations such as the P.L.O. still won't recognize Israel's right to exist. What would you have Israel do?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I just think it's time for Israel to lighten up a little; but I'm saying that as someone who lives 7000 miles away from the situation, and I'm not trying to preach a sermon. I do know that the two things needed in the Middle East are tolerance and restraint on the part of all concerned, and those two things just don't exist there. And so there's going to be more tragic loss of life.

PLAYBOY: Soon after you met Hamaas Abdul-Khaalis, you bought a house in Washington, D.C., that he used as an Islamic center. In 1973, a group of Black Muslims—intent on murdering your mentor—invaded that house and killed seven people, including three of Hamaas' children and his grandchild. Why were the Black Muslims after Hamaas—and were they after you, as well?

ABDUL-JABBAR: I don't think I was in any real danger, but they wanted to kill Hamaas because he'd written letters to them and to other Moslems saying that Elijah Muhammad, the Black Muslims' leader, was a sham and a fake. I'm assuming that was an affront that couldn't be tolerated by the Black Muslims. They sent some people to kill him, but he was out of the house when they came, so they killed his family. From that point on, Hamaas just kept building a bigger and thicker wall around himself. Four years later, in 1977, Hamaas and some other people from my house in D.C. took over some buildings, held hostages, and one person died.

PLAYBOY: Why did he do it?

ABDUL-JABBAR: That was Hamaas' way of protesting the opening of a film called Mohammad, Messenger of God—it's forbidden to create any likeness of the Prophet or alter the teachings or facts of his life. I went to visit Hamaas in jail before the trial, which was the last time I saw him. It's hard to know what's going on in somebody else's mind, but it seemed he was maintaining his usual demeanor and attitude.

PLAYBOY: Do you think he would have tried that take-over if his family hadn't been murdered?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Hamaas claims that had nothing to do with it, but I don't believe that. It just seems to me that he ended up doing something really destructive—there was loss of life, and all the brothers involved in the take-over with him were separated from their families. I didn't see any logic in what he'd done, only harm. It finally made me realize you can't give your life over to anyone. It's much better to make your own decisions and live with your own mistakes than to allow someone else to make decisions for you.

PLAYBOY: Had you done that with Hamaas?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Yes, I gave up way too much. I'd been seeing two women, both of whom converted to Islam because of me and studied the religion with Hamaas. When I decided to marry one of them in 1971, Hamaas strongly advised me to marry the other one instead—and I did as I was advised, even though I knew I wasn't in love with her. The wedding ceremony was held in the Washington house I'd bought for Hamaas, and it was a personal disaster: Because they weren't Moslems, my mother and father weren't permitted to attend. I knew they were outside in the hallway while the ceremony was going on, but I didn't know how to challenge Hamaas. After the wedding, I split. I went and saw my parents, and my mother was very upset, and that wound didn't heal until recently—I'm talking, like, within the past two years.

PLAYBOY: You left your wife in 1973. Was the marriage itself a disaster?

ABDUL-JABBAR: It wasn't a disaster, no. My ex-wife is a wonderful lady and a sincere Moslem, and after the divorce we still saw a lot of each other. I'm very fortunate in that we've eliminated our differences and we have a very positive relationship and beautiful children. I'm thankful for that. I couldn't ask for more.

PLAYBOY: How many children have you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Habiba and I had three children, and I have a fourth from my relationship with Cheryl Pistono.

PLAYBOY: Cheryl Pistono has been depicted as the person most responsible for getting rid of your shyness and reluctance to deal with people. Do you think that's true?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Cheryl definitely helped, and she was the right person for that. But it was something I wanted for myself, and if I hadn't wanted it, it wouldn't have happened. We started living together in 1979, and by then I was no longer dealing with the Moslems in Washington, D.C. When I'd go out, Cheryl would go out with me, and there was a reaction in the press that was like, "He's with a woman. We can talk to this woman." And they could talk to Cheryl—she has quite a personality.

PLAYBOY: Was she a social buffer for you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: Yes, she played that role. We stopped living together at the beginning of 1984, when… let's just say the relationship ran its course. I'd rather not talk about that in public. I don't want to minimize anything Cheryl did for me, but I remember when people started writing that Cheryl was the reason I was happy, and then other people started writing that Magic Johnson was the reason I was happy. The truth is, I was happy just because the Lakers were winning.

PLAYBOY: Before last year, your team hadn't beaten the Celtics in eight N.B.A. finals, including the 1984 championship series. Did you think the Celtics were some kind of jinx for the Lakers?

ABDUL-JABBAR: No, they're just an excellent team; but I thought we should have beaten them in 1984, and we would have if not for two critical mistakes. We lost two games to them in the '84 series because we threw the ball away at crucial times. We really beat ourselves and knew it, and we wanted another shot at them last year, because we had a lot to prove.

PLAYBOY: The Lakers and the Celtics seem to be in a league by themselves. How do the Celtics try to beat you?

ABDUL-JABBAR: The same way they beat everybody else. The Celtics play tough defense and they rebound well. They pride themselves on being a tougher team than we are; at least, they did last year.

PLAYBOY: Tougher in what sense?

ABDUL-JABBAR: That they were more physical and could outrebound us. They thought they had an advantage there, and so did a lot of sportswriters, who'd portrayed the Lakers as quiche eaters. But we knew that if we limited McHale's post-up baskets and played tough defense on Bird and didn't give him any second shots, we could beat them, and that's what happened. It's very rare for a team to win two championships in a row, and it's very important to me that we do it again this year.

PLAYBOY: If the Lakers get to the finals this season, do you think Boston will be there waiting for you again?

ABDUL-JABBAR: It wouldn't surprise me.

PLAYBOY: The Celtics have a team that's two-thirds white in a league that's 70 percent black. Does that strike you as odd?

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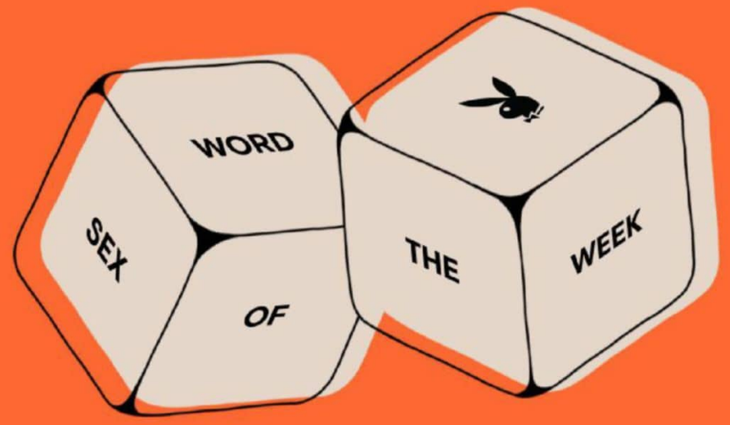
ABDUL-JABBAR: [*Laughs*] We're not supposed to talk about these things. That's a really loaded question.
PLAYBOY: It's not loaded at all; we're being straightforward here. Do you think that Boston's management has a policy of keeping the team predominantly white?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Well, some teams do seem to relish the prospect of having a star player who's white. The Celtics certainly have a couple of star players who are white, and they're great basketball players. If I were a coach or a general manager, I'd want them on my team no matter what their color was. I'm not trying to put racial overtones on this, but as far as what Boston's policy really is, we'll never know.
PLAYBOY: Still, basketball fans often debate whether or not the racial make-up of an N.B.A. team affects its popularity. What do you think?
ABDUL-JABBAR: If race were so important, the N.B.A. wouldn't have set new attendance records the past two seasons. But there's something else to remember here: Whenever you have a winning team, people seem to forget about race very quickly. We get very tribal, but when push comes to shove and the heat gets turned on, we're all about the same basic things and our humanity overcomes all that other crap. A book I read called Bloods, about black soldiers, really brought that point home to me. A black guy who'd never really dealt with white people and resented them got put together in Vietnam with a white guy from the Deep South who considered himself Klan material. When they found themselves out there fighting Charley, they suddenly didn't care who the other guy was—they were on the same side, and screw all that other stuff. Vietnam changed everybody's thinking about who's OK and who isn't. You know how they say there are no atheists in foxholes? I don't believe there are a whole lot of racists in foxholes, either.
PLAYBOY: What about in the rest of American society?
ABDUL-JABBAR: I think it's changing and for the better. For example, a teammate of mine for several years on the Lakers was a guy named Norman Nixon. Norman grew up in Macon, Georgia, and is eight or ten years younger than I am—and he attended an integrated high school and never saw a whites only sign. That, to me, is a monumental change, especially in view of what I told you about my trip down to North Carolina when I was in high school. Certain things have definitely changed for the better. The racist structures that were supported by law have pretty much been struck down, and any that remain are very vulnerable to attack when spotted. As far as the battle for men's hearts and minds is concerned, that continues. But that always will continue.
PLAYBOY: Are you optimistic about the eventual outcome of that battle?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Yeah, I am. People are starting to understand what it means to have a free and open society that respects the rights and appreciates the contributions of all its citizens. Our democracy has never been perfect, and it was hard for Americans to admit that in respect to blacks. Maybe that was understandable, given the fact that blacks weren't brought here to become presidents of corporations. We were brought here to tote that barge and lift that bale. We were brought here to be a convenience. Our men did manual labor and our women slept in their masters' beds. George Washington had something like 18 children with women who were his slaves. You know how people are always wondering, "Why are they all named Washington?" [Laughs] Well, it's legitimate. Jefferson also had a lot of black kids with his slaves. We are, within our population, the children of American Presidents. [*Historians have concluded that Washington had no such children.*]
PLAYBOY: Did you change your name from Lew Alcindor as a stricture of your religion or was it a conscious decision to rid yourself of a slave master's name?
ABDUL-JABBAR: It was a combination of both. As far as I was concerned, I was latching on to something that was part of my heritage, because many of the slaves who were brought here were Moslems. My family was brought to America by a French planter named Alcindor, who came here from Trinidad in the 18th Century. My people were Yoruba, and their culture survived slavery—there are still traces of it in New Orleans and throughout the West Indies, Cuba, Puerto Rico and French-speaking islands like Trinidad. My father found out about that when I was a kid, and it gave me all I needed to know that, hey, I was somebody, even if nobody else knew about it. When I was a kid, no one would believe anything positive that you could say about black people. And that's a terrible burden on black people, because they don't have an accurate idea of their history, which has been either suppressed or distorted. And I'm speaking from experience.
PLAYBOY: You weren't taught black history in school?
ABDUL-JABBAR: The history books I read throughout grade school and high school contained absolutely nothing about what black people did for this country. The only thing I learned was that black people were slaves and that Lincoln freed the slaves and then black people got dumped on during the Reconstruction. I was almost an adult before I found out that Crispus Attucks, a black, had been the first American to die in the Boston Massacre. And it wasn't until I was playing in the N.B.A. that I found out that the Battle of Bunker Hill wasn't decided until Peter Salem, a black guy, shot Major John Pitcairn. Thousands of black people fought hard for America in the Revolutionary War. You know how the cavalry always shows up on time in the movies to save the settlers? Those were really black troops of the Ninth and Tenth cavalries, the buffalo soldiers. They chased Geronimo, they fought Pancho Villa along the borders, and during the Spanish-American War, they fought under General John J. Pershing at San Juan Hill. When you find out things like that, your attitude changes. When I understood what blacks had done here, it was like, "Hey, we've always been involved in meaningful things in America, but nobody's aware of it." Black kids need to know that; they need to know they belong here and have something to offer. Right now, it seems to me that black people only get credit for urban crime and welfare fraud, with a little rhythm-and-blues thrown in. I think that if our contributions to America became better known, it would give young blacks the incentive to do something. It would also give whites an appreciation of what we've contributed, and they would stop looking down on us as baggage.
PLAYBOY: Why haven't the educational systems in predominantly black cities been able to do that job?
ABDUL-JABBAR: No city's educational system is capable of dealing with what black kids have to overcome in order to get an education. The black family structure is a mess, and because there's no supervision outside the school, whatever the kids are taught is rarely reinforced at home. It's a vicious cycle, with child pregnancies being one of the biggest problems. Kids are great at producing babies, but when they see that raising them is an 18-year job, they say, "Screw that." So then we have more kids with no supervision, kids who end up being just like their parents. Until that can be overcome, blacks are not going to be very well educated.

PLAYBOY: Have you tried to do anything about that?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Yes, I worked with Arthur Ashe when he tried to start a literacy program, which consisted of having prominent blacks go around the country to promote literacy. We tried to do whatever we could to make kids deal with books and have some vision of what they'd like to do with their lives. It's proved to be more of a task than Arthur or I or anybody else could overcome.
PLAYBOY: Is it fair to say you're one of the nation's leading role models for black kids?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Yes, but for the wrong reasons. Black kids all want to go out and play basketball or football, and they should be thinking that there's an easier way to make a living. They should be thinking about going to school and having a career that lasts as long as they want it to last. They should be thinking about careers in law, in medicine, in accounting, in various technologies. Unfortunately, you have kids hoping for careers that hinge on their physical abilities, and that's not going to make it. You know how many jobs there are in pro basketball? About 275. And the average pro's career lasts about four years. It's so redundant and depressing. It's the only thing these kids talk about. It's part of the vicious cycle much of the black community has lived with.
PLAYBOY: Do you feel that that kind of thinking may be changing in the black community?
ABDUL-JABBAR: In terms of black people's moving to help themselves, it's a slow process. And understandably so, because until about 20 years ago, the political and economic development of black communities had been stymied by Jim Crow laws and de facto racism and a long history of suppressing black voting rights. It's changing, but it's like we're going from A to B, and the rest of the country has been around the alphabet twice. Blacks still don't have too much faith in the political process, and that's hurting us now.
PLAYBOY: How?
ABDUL-JABBAR: We're not using the political process as effectively as we could to improve our position. A lot of people were surprised when Harold Washington—another one of George's descendants—got elected mayor of Chicago and Wilson Goode got elected mayor of Philadelphia. It's an important new phenomenon, and an encouraging one, and we're going to have to understand what political power means on a local basis and then project it nationally. But because of all the mistrust, I don't know how quickly the black community will exploit its political power. I remember that when I was at UCLA, one of the things we used to say was that if we had James Brown and The Temptations down at the Coliseum, you couldn't keep black people out of there. But if we went down and said, "Look, we're gonna get together and organize to liberate black people," nobody would show up. That used to be a tirade we'd go on for days. But, again, black people don't trust the political process, because we've been zapped by it too many times.
PLAYBOY: Among contemporary politicians, who do you think has been most helpful to black Americans?
ABDUL-JABBAR: President Jimmy Carter, primarily because of his fantastic effort to establish Federal guidelines for hiring minorities.Unfortunately, the current Administration is trying to eliminate all that.
PLAYBOY: How do you feel about Ronald Reagan?
ABDUL-JABBAR: I see a lot of indifference there. I think his attitude is that since the Constitution is such a great document, we don't have to force anybody to do anything, because the Constitution will protect everyone. But if that were true, there would have been no need for the Voting Rights Act, because all the rights blacks were supposed to have were clearly defined in the Constitution. Yet we couldn't exercise those rights, which is why the Voting Rights Act was necessary. I just think Reagan is out of touch. He doesn't know what reality is for a black person, and maybe that explains his indifference.
PLAYBOY: You have a lot of credibility with the public, so you may very well be asked to lend your name to various politicians' Campaigns. Do you plan to become more active in politics?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Well, I'd like to keep that credibility, which will make it real hard for me to get involved. But there are certain politicians I respect, such as Mayor Tom Bradley of Los Angeles and Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey. I don't know that much about Bill's politics, but I know he's honest, which is why I sent him money for his first Senatorial campaign. There are several politicians from California whom I like, and I also respect a guy from Brooklyn named Al Vann, who's done very well organizing black political groups in order to get access to the reins of political power in New York. I think that's what the black community really needs—people who can organize them and show them there's some blood to be gotten out of the turnip. It takes patience and a lot of demonstration before some people understand it, but when they do, it makes for meaningful change.
PLAYBOY: Is there a place for you in that process?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Not at present, but in the future, maybe.
PLAYBOY: When athletes retire, there's a vacuum in their lives that has to be filled. Will you miss the challenges, competition and life of a basketball player?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Sure I will. Fortunately, I still have the friends I made, so that'll take the edge off it; but the life—moving around the country like we do and knowing the people we know—yeah, I'll miss it.
PLAYBOY: In the world of sports, is it important to you how people perceive what you've accomplished?
ABDUL-JABBAR: No, because I've already gotten enough recognition to the point where I know I've impressed a few people. More than a few people. So there's no need for me to go on and on and on. I've played professional basketball longer than anyone else, and it's been great fun just fighting off the inevitable for as long as I have. I've achieved enough to back off without any regrets. I just hope that in remembering me, people will acknowledge my professionalism and consistency.
PLAYBOY: If you're able to control the next 20 years of your life the way you have the past 20 years, what would you like to accomplish?
ABDUL-JABBAR: Well, first I'd like to continue to have a positive relationship with the people who are important in my life, especially my kids. And I want to be able to maintain my business and financial entities. Beyond that, it's hard to say what I'd like to achieve. You're talking about the larger scheme of things, and that's still a big question mark. That's the adjustment I'm going to have to make—finding a direction and being able to move. Right now, I don't know where to direct my social thoughts, religious thoughts, political thoughts and thoughts about uplifting my people. I'm just one person, and at this point, all I know is that I'll play basketball for one more season, and then I'm going to rest for as long as it takes to rid my system of those 5:30-a.m. wake-up calls—the ones you get so that you can catch that next plane to that next game.



IR

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

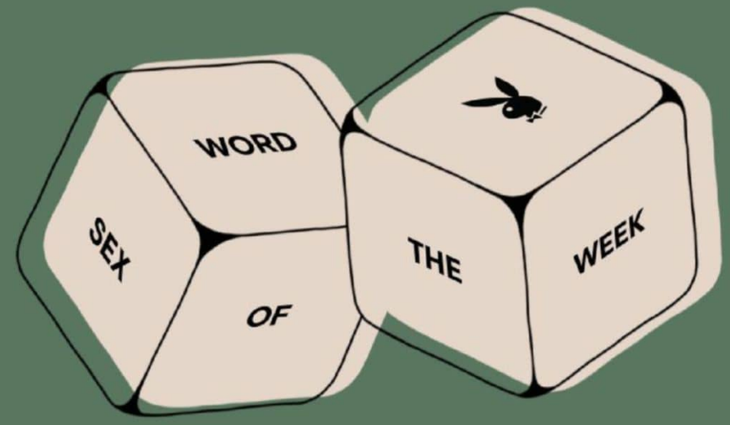
IR (*adj., abbreviation*) adult-industry shorthand for interracial porn scenes, commonly but not always between a white woman and a black man

The adult industry has held multiple town halls on the racist tropes displayed in many IR porn scenes between white and black performers.

The Black Lives Matter movement is sweeping multiple industries, from entertainment to publishing to tech, with accusations of racism forcing a much-needed reckoning. This is true of the adult business as well. In recent weeks the industry, which typically operates under the radar due to society's reticence around anything involving sex, has experienced heightened levels of scrutiny. Many of the allegations and criticisms relate to IR, or interracial, scenes, a marketing term that has become steeped in problematic connotations.

In the adult world, black actors have to traverse a treacherous minefield of stereotypes, marginalization and discrimination in order to see any type of payday, and in the wake of the George Floyd protests, black performers' stories are finally gaining mainstream attention and momentum. In the adult lexicon, the term interracial is much narrower than its standard definition and almost always refers to a white or white-adjacent female actress shooting a sex scene with a black male actor. IR scenes can be a financial boon for white actresses: It's common for them to demand a payment much higher than their regular rate in order to perform with a black man. A prominent white actress can expect a tiny windfall for her "first IR" scene, with the phrase even becoming a subgenre on major porn sites. None of that bonus money trickles down to their black male counterparts, who often have to fight to be paid market rates for their work. The practice of paying premium rates to white participants in IR scenes while black actors receive less for the same work perpetuates damaging hierarchies about race and skin color in the porn industry and in America's sexual dialogue at large.

Sparked by the historic social shift that America is undergoing, major studios are finally having to address racism in the billion-dollar industry, and porn consumers are having to think harder about what they choose to consume and what it means to view porn ethically.



Fluid-bond

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

fluid-bond (*verb*) to exchange bodily fluids during sexual activity after making a mutual decision to stop using protective barriers

After much discussion and a visit to a testing clinic, Taylor and Emmy decided to move to the next stage of sexual intimacy by fluid-bonding.

This week's sex word emerged from the multifaceted world of polyamory but is now often used in a monogamous context as well. To put it simply, fluid-bonding is when sexual partners decide to stop using protective barriers (a condom, a dental dam, etc.) during sexual activity and exchange bodily fluids. It typically refers to ejaculate but can also include saliva, blood or other bodily secretions. Fluid-bonding takes on significance in the poly community, as an individual may be sleeping with multiple partners but decide to reserve fluid-bonding for a single partner, especially if their poly dynamic is hierarchical.

You might be thinking, I've had unprotected sex before; how is fluid-bonding any different? Fluid-bonding is usually seen as a thoughtful and intentional act, a meaningful display of trust and vulnerability. It's also heavily based on consent, where all partners involved have an open and honest dialogue about their sexual health and sexual histories. It's usually not bringing home a one-time hookup and hastily deciding to forgo barrier protection after rummaging around fruitlessly in your nightstand. Fluid-bonding can be a risky endeavor, as there's always the possibility of contracting or spreading sexual transmitted diseases. If there's penile-vaginal intercourse involved, there's also the chance of an unplanned pregnancy. You can mitigate these risks by being tested for STIs in advance of fluid-bonding and by finding an alternate mode of contraception such as the pill or an IUD. When it's an informed choice by all parties, fluid-bonding can be a satisfying way to build a more intimate connection and feel closer to your partner(s)!

BONNY
Gombert

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"I like a man that doesn't show off, a guy who knows how to treat his lady."

Could you tell us a little about yourself Bonny? I'm an energetic person. I like to socialize but I also love my privacy and alone time. I am money motivated, straightforward forward and I don't care what people think of me as I'm here to please myself in life, not others. I am always trying to be positive in the worst situations. Also, one thing people don't know about me is that I studied massage therapy when I was 16 after I stopped school, therefore, I am also a qualified massage therapist.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy? Yes, of course, I was excited, I love Playboy!

What inspires you? Money

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modeling? Because I love to be seen, I love the attention, and I am confident.

What are some of your hobbies? I love to party, be out in nature, I love to eat, I always want to do something new and fun!

Name three things on your bucket list? Travel everywhere, sky diving and skiing in the alps.

Turn-ons... I like a smart guy with a hot body. I like a man that doesn't show off, a guy who knows how to treat his lady.

Turnoffs... A guy that goes for every girl (is not selective) or doesn't pay for anything. A man that depends on the girl or makes excuses for everything and a guy that gives me very little attention.

Describe to us your perfect date... Anything new and fun, something adventurous and surprising.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why? New York City and London because they seem incredible to me.

Describe yourself in three words... Fun, kind, and beautiful.

Do you feel more like a city or a country person? Definitely country, I don't like the city, there are too many people.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be? Spain, where I currently live, on the coast, who doesn't love the sun?

What do you enjoy most about what you do? The attention, it's fun to be sexy in front of the camera.

What would you say is your best feature? My face and ass the most but I love my whole body.

What makes you feel sexy? Normally, I always feel sexy but I feel sexiest when I am fresh and dressed up.

What are you really good at? I like to be good at everything I do!

Follow Bonny's journey on Instagram @bonnygombert for all her latest news and story updates!

FLLWR

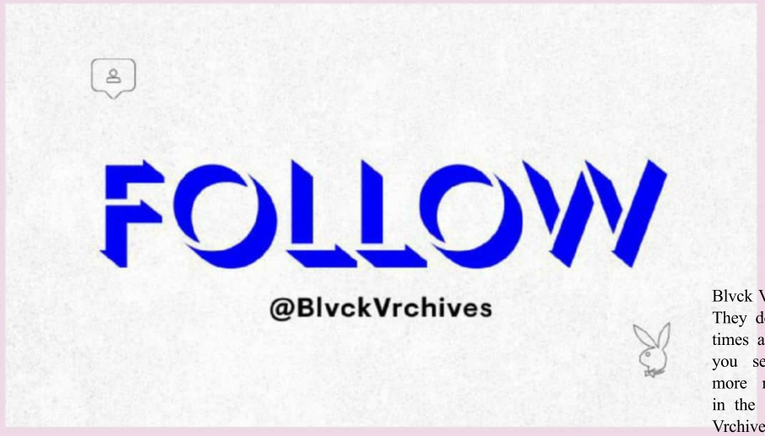
Follow, Listen, Laugh, Watch, Read: Five Recs From Comedian David Gborie

WRITTEN BY
DAVID GBORIE

INTRODUCTION
JAMES RICKMAN

Welcome to **FLLWR,** where a comedian offers five recs carefully selected to amuse and inspire you in these unusual times

Stand-up comedian and writer David Gborie was recently featured on Comedy Central Stand-Up Presents, delivering half an hour in which he compares doing cocaine to peeing your pants. He co-hosts the much-loved All Fantasy Everything podcast, which continues to air every week, thanks to Zoom.



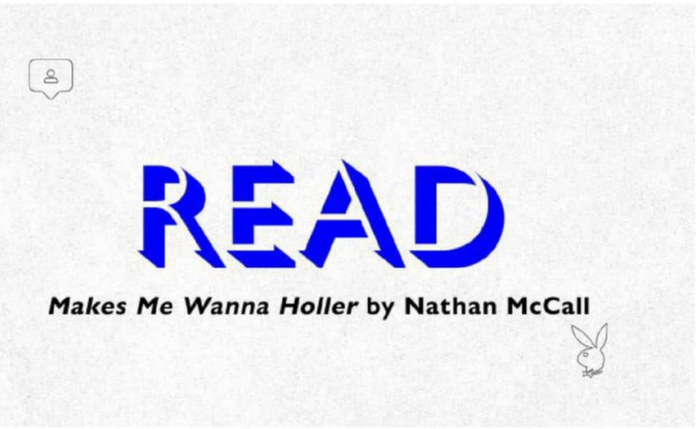
Blvck Vrchives is just beautiful pictures. They do such a good job of capturing times and places. A lot of times when you see historical photos it's from more metropolitan areas—New York in the 1950s or whatever. With Blvck Vrchives, you see a family reunion in Arkansas, some guys smoking in Clinton, Tennessee, people dancing in a living room in Long Beach, stuff like that. Everyone looks so noble; it's just a great way to see blackness in all its forms. I get stuck looking at it for hours.

I grew up with her in my house. Obviously my mom was a big fan, and even as an adult I don't believe other singers in the way that I believe Whitney Houston. "Saving All My Love for You" is about her sleeping with a married man, and the point is that even though he's married, she's still not going to sleep with anyone else but him. That makes me want to cry, man, 'cause when you listen to her sing it, you feel her heart. It's all of the emotions. Part of it is sexy: She's like, "When I see you, it's on." But she's in such a fucked-up spot. She's like, "I know you got your family, and that's cool, and this is never going to be any more than this thing." But she loves that thing so much, and that gets me every time.

I'm a stand-up comic now, but stand-up didn't really connect with me growing up. And then right after I started doing it, Elephant in the Room came out, and it was the first time I saw somebody do comedy so effortlessly. I was like, Oh, you can just talk and be the best at it. And from a technical standpoint—he opens the special with crowd work, which no one ever does, and he kind of divides the audience into three parts and plays people against each other. If you can make me laugh at something I don't agree with, that's the hardest trick there is. And most of the stuff Patrice O'Neal says I don't agree with at all. And when you watch it, it doesn't fucking matter.

I don't tend to watch a lot of British stuff, but People Just Do Nothing is real weird and so much fun. It's a documentary-style show about these guys who live on an estate—England's version of projects. They run a hardcore drum-and-bass pirate radio station called Kurupt FM, and it only broadcasts to their estate, so only people on that estate can listen to it. There are these typical delusions of grandeur, like the main guy thinking he's a real rapper and being obsessed with Jamaica even though he's not Jamaican at all. So much comedy is about rich people, because then they don't have problems and they can focus on the comedy. I like shows about normal people. I like it when the relationships are complicated, especially in comedy. It's the opposite of my humor, and the harder it is to do, the more I appreciate the magic of it.

This guy had a difficult youth, did a bunch of crimes, eventually shot somebody, went to prison, got out and ended up becoming a journalist. When I first read his memoir (I was about 14 or 15), I was interested in this guy's youth, right? But as an adult I realized that it's just as interesting to read about how he reintegrated into society. That second act of Makes Me Wanna Holler, about how somebody can come back from a difficult life, is just the best. I often think that life is about distance traveled—not physical as much as emotional and mental. And with that guy, the distance traveled is just incredible.



Playboy Interview
DAN SAVAGE

A candid conversation with the colorful sex columnist and LGBT-rights champion about the state of sex in the U.S. for straights, gays and everyone else

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID SHEFF** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MARIUS BUGGE**

In pre-1960s America, if you had questions about sex (Is masturbation cheating? What's a butterfly flick? Butter or margarine?), you were at the mercy of your friends, who probably knew less than you did. Then came the sexual revolution with its free-flowing sex advice, some of it accurate. We like to think the Playboy Advisor column, as it reassured, instructed and entertained several generations of men, gave birth to a genre that thrives today.

One of the most read and most controversial sex columnists working now is Dan Savage, whose Savage Love column is syndicated in more than 50 newspapers around the world. Savage also dispenses his hilarious and sage advice in best-selling books, podcasts and blogs, as well as a smartphone app. And he's gay, but the majority of his readers are straight. p"His columns answer a Chaucerian panorama of correspondents," according to Washington Monthly. m"Gay Mormons, incestuous siblings, weight-gain fetishists, men yearning to be cuckolded and otherwise ordinary Americans grappling with an extraordinary range of problems and proclivities."

Along with his unconventional sex advice, Savage is known for his advocacy of LGBT rights, including gay marriage. He has frequently appeared as a liberal pundit on CNN, Real Time With Bill Maher and The Colbert Report. And he has been repeatedly attacked, even condemned, by conservative politicians, media pundits and clergy. Savage hasn't been reluctant to fight back against those he deems homophobic and dangerous. After Rick Santorum compared homosexuality to bestiality, Savage announced a contest to redefine the word santorum. The winning definition—which he explains in this interview—continues to plague the former senator, who is reportedly exploring another presidential run in 2016.

Savage, 50, was born in Chicago, where his father was a police officer and his mother a homemaker. He now lives in Seattle with his husband, Terry Miller. They married in Canada in 2005 and renewed their vows in 2012, following the legalization of gay marriage in Washington. The couple has an adopted son, DJ, who has come out of the closet to Savage and Miller—as straight.

In September 2010, prompted by the suicide of a teenager who had been bullied because classmates thought he was gay, Savage and Miller created the It Gets Better project. They made a video in which they speak to gay kids who are isolated and feeling hopeless. They posted it online and encouraged others to follow suit. p"The idea was simple," Savage explains in American Savage: Insights, Sights and Fights on Faith, Sex, Love and Politics, his latest best-seller. m"There were LGBT kids out there who couldn't picture futures with enough joy in them to compensate for the pain they were in now. We wanted to offer them encouragement." The It Gets Better project currently has more than 60,000 videos. Celebrities and politicians, including President Barack Obama, have contributed.

"I don't believe all sexual expression is good. Sex is powerful. It can destroy you."

At a time when support for gay marriage is increasing, gay sports stars are coming out of the closet and more openly gay members are serving in Congress, we asked Contributing Editor David Sheff, whose last interview for us was with the Chinese artist-dissident Ai Weiwei, to meet with Savage. Sheff says that when he arrived to begin the interview, Savage admitted he was nervous about speaking to PLAYBOY, thought by some to be a bastion of heterosexuality. g"But he quickly relaxed," Sheff says. "Soon he was animated, speaking passionately, emotionally, vividly and hilariously about a wide range of subjects. Clearly he warmed up to talking to PLAYBOY, as evidenced by a text he sent soon after the interview's conclusion. "I forgot to say one thing," he wrote. "I have lusted in my heart."

PLAYBOY: According to the Playboy Advisor, the number one question sex columnists are asked is m"Am I normal?" What's behind the obsession with normalcy?

SAVAGE: Even though everyone has non-normative desires—variance is the norm, in fact—people are terrified by what they think and want. When you ask people what they see in their minds when they imagine two people having normal sex, they say the missionary position, vaginal intercourse and husband and wife, with the intention of making a baby. How rare is that? That's freaky shit right there. That is not normal.

PLAYBOY: If the non-normal is normal, why do people need to be reassured?

SAVAGE: Sex negativity is imposed on us by religion, parents and a culture that can't deal with sex. We pretend sex doesn't interest us, while the culture is sexually obsessed. I also think sex negativity is hardwired into the human experience. You're born with it, because when you're a kid, prepuberty, sex is this fucked-up thing grown-ups do. When you hear about it, you think, Creepy, gross. Like, oh my God, you adults do whaaaat? Then you hit puberty and the riptide pulls you out; you get sucked under by this thing you swore you'd never do. It's terrifying. That's why people are plagued by their desires and why they need to be constantly reassured. They never wanted to get into that ocean, and they're suddenly drowning. Your dick or your pussy seizes control of your brain and tells you who's really in charge.

PLAYBOY: What's the root of religious conservatism about sex?

SAVAGE: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and almost every other faith have constantly tried to insert themselves between your genitals and your salvation, because then they can regulate and control you. Then you need them to intercede with God, so they target your junk and stigmatize your sexual desire. If you have somebody by the balls or the ovaries, you've got them.

PLAYBOY: And then you come along, telling us that when it comes to sex, anything goes.

SAVAGE: I don't say anything goes. I don't believe all sexual expression is good. Sex is powerful, and you must approach it thoughtfully, because it can destroy you.

PLAYBOY: Destroy us how?

SAVAGE: Sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancy, partner violence. It's why we need comprehensive, responsible, kink-inclusive, queer-inclusive sex education for all kids.

PLAYBOY: Did your parents talk to you about sex?

SAVAGE: When my brothers and sisters were teenagers and having their first relationships, my parents were all over them. g"Who are you going out with?" "Where are you going?" "I want to meet this person." My sister was sexually active, as I was, in high school—sorry, Laura, I hope your son doesn't read this—and she could go to my mom and say, "My boyfriend is saying g'If you loved me, you wouldn't make me use a condom,'" and Mom could blow up and yell at her boyfriend if he was stupid enough to show his face at our house. When I had a boyfriend at 16, I couldn't rely on my mom to vet this shit. I wasn't out to her at that point, so I couldn't confide in her at all, which is a problem for a lot of queers. They fly blind into adult relationships.

PLAYBOY: With what result?

SAVAGE: You're 15 and watching your siblings have relationships, and you want to have a boyfriend too. But because their age-appropriate boyfriend targets aren't out yet, a lot of young gay kids

date older people, which is a recipe for potential disaster. My first boyfriend when I was a teenager was 28, and he was a wonderful guy and good for me. But the odds that it might be an exploitative relationship are that much higher.

PLAYBOY: If not your parents, was there an equivalent of Dan Savage you could go to for sex advice?

SAVAGE: I read Xaviera Hollander, the Happy Hooker, her Call Me Madam column. She took questions about kinky sex, crazy sex, bi sex, BDSM, and was so unfazed. She gave advice that was constructive, not judgmental.

PLAYBOY: What do you think of others in the media who offer sex advice? How about Dr. Laura?

SAVAGE: Dr. Laura is a vile piece of shit.

PLAYBOY: Dr. Phil?

SAVAGE: He's part of the advice-industrial Oprah complex. I'm not a big fan of telling women that when their husband looks at porn it's a form of cheating. That's what you say if you want to drive the divorce rate up even higher than it is.

PLAYBOY: What do you tell a woman whose husband looks at porn?

SAVAGE: He'll pretend not to look, you pretend to believe him, and then give him some credit for covering his tracks if he does so successfully. If you stumble over evidence once in a great while, then you repay his courtesy of covering his tracks most of the time by ignoring it.

PLAYBOY: What impact does the availability of limitless porn online have on kids as they grow up?

SAVAGE: A lot of girls have the expectation that they'll have to do all these things they see in porn, whether they want to or not. And it weighs on the boys too that they'll have to perform all these acts. It's as big a stressor for boys as it is for girls. They see these 20-inch dicks and rock-hard abs and all that. I tell my son, g"You have to be careful when you look at porn. A lot of porn is for men who can't get laid, who can't get girlfriends. A lot of porn is created for angry men." Kids see porn and think that's what sex is. So we have to say to boys and girls what the right-wing fundamentalist fucktards won't say, which is that other kinds of sex are normal and at your ages it might be better to masturbate together. That oral sex is less risky. That a lot of what adults do isn't vaginal intercourse. That everyone doesn't have a 20-inch dick. It can lift the burden from them. But parents don't talk about sex at all with their kids. It's hard talking about sex with a teenager. My son doesn't want to hear it from me or anyone else, but you have to meddle. You have to say, "You can roll around and jerk off. That's a lot of what adults do."

"Straight people need to have more sex partners, and gays need to have fewer."

ELIZABETH ANN

Model **@ELIZABETHCHARNAYA**

Photography by **MOSAAB ALSARAY ART**
@MOSAABALSARAYART | MOSAABALSARAYART.COM

"I am a fairly nerdy and shy woman who has a passion for artificial intel ligence. I love technology."

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy? It's an absolute dream come true and this is my sixth publication with the Playboy brand. It is an honor.

Tell us something surprising about you? I am a fairly nerdy and shy woman who has a passion for artificial intelligence. I love technology.

Describe yourself in one sentence... A passionate, ambitious, loving, future wife who only wants to make the world a better place.

What are some of your hobbies? Podcasting, reading, snowboarding, exercising, and traveling.

What is your biggest turn-on? Men who can see past the physicality of a woman and look deeper into the internal aspects of who she is and what she brings to the table.

What turns you off the most? Cowardly men.

Describe to us your perfect date... Picking me up even though it may be far and fine wine and dine me. I'm fairly easy-going when it comes to a first date.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far? Being able to get people outside of the modeling world to comprehend how difficult commercial modeling is versus runway.

Any last words you would like to share with our readers? Never let a previous lover, foe, friends, nor family hinder your ability to achieve and excel at all that your heart desires. Life is too short to live unhappy and unfulfilled internally and externally.

Follow Elizabeth's adventures on Instagram @elizabethcharnaya or visit her website elizabethcharnay.com for all her latest news and story updates!

This Is an *UPRISING*

When it comes to whiteness and privilege in America, there are no innocent bystanders

BY **ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON**

It was after midnight, and I'd just turned 36 years old. The estimated life expectancy for a trans woman of color had once been reported to be just 35. As I lay in bed facing the ceiling, tears made their way from the outer corners of my eyes and down the nape of my neck. I thought about everyone who had trudged with me through one of the most disenfranchised chapters of my life. Yet unlike myself, they didn't make it. I thought about what their story would have been like had they received the opportunities I've been given over the years; they were most definitely worthy of them.

Although I'd officially "made it" and beat the statistic, the sense of urgency I'd carried prior to turning 36 hadn't dissipated in the least bit. Instead, I continue to carry the burden of making sure my trans sisters "made it" as well. It's what Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera would have done, and the fact that I'd beaten the most insurmountable odds while dangerously marginalized, proved me to be indomitable. In the words of Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, p"When the dust settles, I want a whole bunch of transgender girls to stand up and say, I'm still fucking here." I am still determined to push back against racial and gender-based injustices, now armed with the belief that Black trans women are not statistics. We are our ancestors' greatest hopes, dreams and aspirations—and we deserve the chance to manifest our own.

My work isn't done simply because I beat out a statistic formed by a system that continues to produce the conditions that keep those statistics in place. We must dismantle systemic transmisogynoir, which describes our experiences at the intersections of racism, sexism and transphobia. In the LGBTQ community, I'm faced with anti-blackness. In the feminist movement, I'm faced with the erasure of my womanhood. And in the Black community I have to prove that Black trans lives matter too, without my plight being deemed a distraction from collective Black liberation.

If anyone were to zoom out and examine the obstacle course Black trans women have to navigate in order to have our essential needs met, and be treated with basic respect and dignity, it would become abundantly clear as to why we succumb to our circumstances. When we exist outside of the lines of respectability, we're not offered employment. If we're not employed, we don't have access to housing or healthcare. If we don't have either of those, many of us engage in riskier survival-based behaviors that cause greater health disparities and also find ourselves caught in the clutches of the prison industrial complex. And that's if we're not murdered by someone who preys on our vulnerability. When these experiences overlap with one another, a precious life is ripped away from the world.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it compounded the pre-existing challenges Black trans women face. Concerned for everyone, especially Black trans women, I immediately got to work. Typically, I'd be in the field providing direct aid, or on the frontline protesting for racial justice given the recent string of Black murders. However, I have asthma and other respiratory complications, making

If a White person isn't actively working to dismantle systems of anti-Blackness, they're actively benefiting from it.

Allyship was never meant to be convenient. It was never meant to be comfortable, come with a reward card, more followers, or pats on the back.

me much more susceptible to contracting COVID-19. I started exploring ways I could support Black trans women, Black people in general, and every other vulnerable community disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, while practicing self-care. Practicing self-care has afforded me the opportunity to care for others.

I launched a campaign called #YouAreEssential to fund grassroots organizations serving the needs of America's most marginalized. I also launched a sub-initiative called #PridePledge, which asks major corporations that have sponsored Pride festivals all across the country, to reallocate a percentage of their earmarked funds toward vulnerable members of LGBTQ community. Since Pride festivals all across the country were canceled, myself and more than 20,000 people who've signed the change.org petition are asking corporations to show up and get to know the real LGBTQ community that exists outside of their marketing deck. I was swiftly reminded of not only the ways in which capitalism, structural and institutional racism were designed to prevent the disenfranchised from thriving, but also how complicit many of our self-proclaimed allies are. Here I am, fighting on the margins with every ounce of my being for every community my identity overlaps with, and yet I find myself still having to convince our allies that our lives matter, too.

To those with their hearts set on supporting Black trans women, I first recommend doing your research. Coming to us for education that's readily accessible on the internet creates more labor for us than we're already forced to do because of the cross-cultural ties within our movement work. Once you've taken the initiative to inform yourself on our experiences, bring an open heart and mind, willing feet and helping hands. Purchase books and other works from Black trans authors, academics and activists. By doing this, you can educate yourself and economically empower us. Break the information down into pieces. Read books on trans identity and anti-Blackness as you'll begin to understand the nuances better. Donate money to organizations lead by Black trans people and offer direct aid however you can.

Author, academic and activist Angela Davis once said, p"In a racist society, it's not enough to be non-racist. We must be anti-racist." That means if a White person isn't actively working to dismantle systems of anti-Blackness, they're actively benefiting from it. The epistemology of ignorance delves into the way those unwilling to confront their own inherent racism gaslight Black and/or trans people to avoid the work. They intentionally, and quite militantly, mentally bypass their understanding of race and gender, as not to disrupt their delusions of progressiveness and their notions of what it means to be a "good person." When other White people encounter this archetype, they must hold a mirror up to them and not exacerbate their cognitive dissonance by infantilizing them. Saying nothing is not an option for anyone who considers themselves an ally. Stop leaving us to fight for our lives, while educating the unwilling, and trying to save the lives of others. We shouldn't be tasked with dismantling a system we didn't build.

Allyship was never meant to be convenient. It was never meant to be comfortable, come with a reward card, more followers or pats on the back. It was meant to be disruptive, uncomfortable, inconvenient and messy. Put your voice on the line, your body on the line, your social and monetary capital on the line. This is what true allyship looks like. When it comes to whiteness and privilege in America, there are no innocent bystanders.

ALLYSHIP *FOR* BEGINNERS

Brand-new to the concept of being an ally? Read this how-to manual right now

BY **PLAYBOY**

As the global protests against police brutality continue to surge, so too does coverage about how to support the movement and those behind it. If you are asking what you can do to help, one individual-oriented answer is to become an ally. As an ally, you commit to being actively and productively anti-racist. You commit to amplifying Black voices. You own up to your privilege and the oppression rooted in that privilege, and then use that privilege to the advantage of the cause.

This guide is intended as a resource for white people who want to take action, though others may find it useful as well. It is a starting point; you must go beyond these suggestions and commit to long-term action.

Dos of Allyship

• Do listen.
• Do educate yourself.
• Do own your history.
• Do engage in conversations.
• Do show up.
• Do open your purse.
• Do use your voice. It's okay to feel uncomfortable; growth often is.

Don'ts of Allyship

• Don't ask your Black friends and peers what to do or how you can help. It is not their responsibility to be your private resource for an anti-racist education—you must do that work on your own.
• Don't assume all Black people think the same way, or that you know what they think. You don't get to decide who's right or wrong. Just listen.
• Don't take credit for work done by the Black community.
• Don't be paralyzed by "white guilt" or by fear that you'll mess up. Nobody is perfect, and your solidarity matters more than your anxiety.
• Don't prioritize your feelings or your story over those of Black people. Now is the time to listen and support, not to take the spotlight.
• Don't try to compare your personal struggles. Instead, let that empathy fuel your solidarity and supportive actions.

Social Media Best Practices

Posting on social media is a key action white people can take right now. Anxious about getting "political" on your channels? Worried about losing followers? That hesitation is a reflection of the discomfort you feel in beginning to do the uncomfortable work of being anti-racist—not just "not racist." Do the uncomfortable work that will help our society abandon the institutions that perpetuate inequality and allow violence against Black people.

As an ally, follow these considerations online:
• Do not share content that shows trauma or violence being inflicted upon Black folks; it could add to existing trauma. And be careful with what you Like on Twitter—that content may be displayed to your followers too.
• Start following Black accounts instead of simply reposting what your white friends are sharing, and take the time to look at what those accounts are saying and who the people behind them are.
• Use your platform to share helpful resources, or ask friends to match your recent donations.
• Use your platform to start conversations with other white people.
• Please, no more solid-black squares. Posting them is an empty gesture of performative activism: an action taken for the sheer purpose of increasing one's social capital, instead of truly supporting (or caring) about a cause. If you're doing it to be trendy, it is not activism; it's self-indulgent and hollow.
• Be a critical thinker. Just because you've seen something reposted a bunch of times by people you like doesn't mean you should too; it may not be in line with what you truly support. Think carefully and inform yourself before taking action.

If you're doing it to be trendy, it is not activism; it's self-indulgent and hollow.

Conversation Starters

Using social media to show your allyship is important, but are you practicing your preach offline? (Remember, not everyone uses social media.) Having conversations with family, friends, colleagues or people in your community is a necessity for allies. Talk about what you have seen or been thinking about, check each other, and encourage each other. But more important, when opening up conversations with your family and friends about racism or the BLM protests, if your talk begins with Black struggle, stop yourself. You must first address and acknowledge your privileged position as a white person. Here are some ways to kick off the conversation:
• Set clear and productive goals for the conversation. A goal can help ground conversations if they get confusing, heated or derailed. Refocus the discussion when needed, avoid microaggressions and stay calm—don't

get defensive.
• Ask others to elaborate on their opinions instead of shutting them down immediately. Be mindful of tone and language; conversations are pathways to understanding and to education.
• Recommend to your friends and family members a book, an article, a movie or TV show that deals directly with systemic racism or the Black experience. This will give you all something shared to talk about; use it as a springboard for a discussion that you can go back to.
• Share and discuss your news sources.
Look to various Instagram guides that have popped up recently:

• *Jen Winston (@jenerous) compiled a guide with nine suggestions on how to talk to your family about racism.*

• *Anna Edwards (@dwardslife) put together a two-part guide on "What to Say When People Deny the Reality of What's Happening Right Now." Uninformed remarks about racism, police brutality, all lives matter and more still abound; Edwards has created a handy guide on how best to engage with and respond to the (usually white) people making the comments.*

Self-Education

Educational resources and recommendations have surged over the past two weeks. Check them out, and as you incorporate anti-racist works into your regular reading routine, be sure to include historical volumes as well as newer content.

Take time to reflect on yourself and your own life and experiences. Our society and the structures within it have been shaped by white supremacy since this country was founded. Reflect on your personal beliefs and the structures that have benefited you as a non-Black person. Understanding how you fit into the systemic racism in this country is an important step in understanding the history of systemic racism in this country.

Act Locally

• Vote! Make sure you are registered. Do your ballot research for upcoming local elections, and show up on Election Day armed with the knowledge of which candidates support justice and equality. Local races directly impact city funding and resource allocations (such as defunding the police), as well as who runs police commissions and other important entities. The presidential election is this November, but there will be many other races on the ballot—start doing your research now.
• If you are able to physically show up at a protest, that's great. If you are not, that's okay too. There are ways to be helpful from home: You could call your local representatives, donate, sign petitions, call a friend or family member, sign up for vote-by-mail.
• A great way to ensure long-term support for Black communities is to buy from Black-owned businesses. Check out your local bookstores and restaurants. Start following and investing in Black-owned clothing companies and beauty brands; Ava Nirui (@avanope) has put together an ongoing list of Black fashion brands to support. Be mindful about where you spend your dollars.
• Check in on your Black friends, family, loved ones and close colleagues by letting them know you're available for support. This is not a time to reach out to your Black acquaintances or people you are not close with. Before texting or calling, read Jesse Sparks's great guide to "How to Check in With Your Black Friends Right Now." Make sure you have something to say beyond asking "How are you?" and that you have concrete plans for other supportive actions.

Support Black communities by buying from Black-owned businesses.

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Tony McDade are not isolated incidents; they are representative of a broader pattern of police violence against Black bodies, and are the result of institutions and white supremacy that enable it. As an ally, your support should not end when the news coverage fades out. Continue to hold yourself and your community accountable. Keep caring, keep talking, keep growing, keep learning, keep donating (if you're able), keep calling and keep showing up.

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